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**CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM PROJECT  
SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS:  
CRITICAL COMPONENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM PLANNING**

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## SUMMARY

### CRITICAL COMPONENTS FOR JUSTICE SYSTEM PLANNING

This executive summary presents the findings from a three-year evaluation conducted by Policy Studies Inc. of a national demonstration project titled the Criminal Justice System Project (CJSP). The project was sponsored and supported by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), and the Corrections Program Office (CPO) to create better criminal sanctioning policy.

#### **Overview of the Criminal Justice System Project**

January 1997, NIC began a three-year Criminal Justice System Project (CJSP). This project emerged from an Institute-wide strategic planning process where the top priority program goal was to develop an effective system of correctional sanctions. The CJSP was developed to address the system-wide sanctioning needs within the jurisdictions participating in the project, using facilitated local planning teams supported by information from a comprehensive system assessment. The decision-making body for the CJSP in each of the project sites was a local policy team composed of representatives from all of the criminal justice agencies in the jurisdiction and, in some sites, citizen members. To help the sites organize themselves to be successful, the CJSP assigned each site an outside consultant who served as a site coordinator. The site coordinators conducted from 3-5 visits to their sites

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each project year. In addition, two consultants worked with the project to provide assistance to the sites in collecting and analyzing jail population data. The CJSP approach consisted of two elements: a system assessment and a system-wide collaborative planning effort. The system assessment was designed to gather the following information:

- An inventory of sanctions and programs available in each site's criminal justice system;
- Profiles of the criminal justice agencies in the site;
- An inventory of community resources to provide assistance to offenders;
- A process map of the criminal justice system;
- An analysis of the offender population, from jail data and court record data; and
- An analysis of the criminal justice issues in the site.

The second element of the CJSP was a collaborative planning effort to develop an integrated, coordinated system of correctional sanctions and programs. Specifically, the planning in each site was expected to result in:

- A statement of the mission of the criminal justice system;
- A vision of where the criminal justice system ought to be moving in the future;
- Agreement on issues/problems within the current criminal justice system;

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- Identification of the policy team's long term goals and objectives for the criminal justice system; and
  - An action agenda for immediate next steps.

The CJSP approach was originally designed so that the assessment phase preceded the planning phase. In practice, however, no two sites followed the same progression of events, and work on the two elements proceeded simultaneously.

### **Description of the Evaluation**

The principal objective of our evaluation was to assess the utility and effectiveness of the CJSP process in the demonstration sites. The evaluation examined a variety of process, intermediate output, and project outcome measures. In general, this included an assessment of:

- how the broad-based policy team was formed and developed;
- the activities and approach used to examine the existing criminal justice and correctional policy-making structure and sanctioning practices;
- the activities and approach used to develop a long range plan;
- the ability of each policy team to (1) work collaboratively; (2) use data about the sanctioning system to make improved policy decisions; (3) articulate a vision and shared goals for the criminal justice system; (4) develop new sanctioning options to meet policy goals; and (5) develop long term strategies for bringing about system-wide change; and

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- the outcomes/results each site achieved.

The data we used to make the observations and findings were collected from multiple sources, including:

- Four or more site visits to each project site, during which PSI evaluation team members: (1) interviewed policy team members; (2) observed policy team meetings; (3) observed some of the assessment activities; (4) observed post-assessment policy team retreats; (5) observed post-retreat work group and policy team meetings; and (6) conducted debriefing meetings in each site approximately three and nine months after the end of the CJSP;
- A review of project documents from each site, including (1) the original application and supporting materials; (2) minutes of policy team meetings; (3) assessment reports; and (4) other documentation of site activities;
- Discussions with site coordinators by telephone, during site visits, and at site coordinators' meetings;
- Discussions with the lead local person in each of the sites by telephone and during site visits; and
- An analysis of the results of a survey on collaboration administered twice to all the policy team members in each site, first during the period from

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14-20 months into the project and again approximately 30 months into the project.

## **Critical Elements for Collaborative Justice System Planning**

This section discusses the critical elements for the collaborative justice system planning, based on the findings of the evaluation. It presents our recommendations for starting up and sustaining momentum in a project of the CJSP's scope and breadth. In the following discussion our recommendations are grouped into the following phases: (1) site selection; (2) formation of the policy team; (3) start-up; (4) information gathering; (5) planning; (6) maintaining momentum; and (7) creating the capacity to implement change.

### **Recommendations For the Site Selection Phase**

Selecting the sites for a project such as the CJSP is a critical part of the project. If a site is to succeed in a project like the CJSP, the criminal justice leaders must have a clear perception of the need for the project, understand what will be expected of them, and be willing to commit the necessary resources to complete the work of the project. Below are recommendations for the site selection phase to assist NIC in evaluating the sites' readiness to engage in this type of work.

*Recommendation 1.* Describe the process and approach fully in the Request for Proposal. Describe the phases or elements of the process as well

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as some of the likely tasks or activities of the policy team. Define the expectations of the sites and policy team members and lay out and discuss the inherent values of doing system-wide work.

*Recommendation 2.* Ask sites to explain in their applications why they believe they can be successful at working collaboratively to make system-wide improvements. Look for local conditions that will support their efforts, examples of successes in the past, or indications of the site's interest in learning a new approach to working together to make criminal justice system improvements.

*Recommendation 3.* Ask sites to clarify the authority (or anticipated authority) of the policy team in their jurisdiction. Determine if the policy team will be a decision-making or recommending body. Wherever possible, encourage the policy team to be officially sanctioned as the entity to make decisions for and improvements to the criminal justice system.

*Recommendation 4.* Ask sites to give examples of system-wide issues they would like to address through a project of this nature (rather than identifying *the* single problem they want to address). This is intended to keep sites open to identifying problems as part of the process rather than believing the problem is already defined, and thus, wanting to move immediately to finding solutions for their predetermined problem.

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**Recommendation 5.** Ensure that the people who will be involved in the project perceive a need for the project and understand what will be expected of them.

### **Recommendations For the Formation of the Policy Team**

It is important for a policy team in a project of this nature to be officially recognized and have the authority to make decisions for the criminal justice system. The membership, size and structure of the policy team are all critical issues that must be considered. Below are recommendations with regard to the formation of the policy team.

**Recommendation 6.** Assure that the policy team has the membership necessary to create effective, system-wide criminal justice policy, including all top criminal justice system agency heads, human service and treatment leaders, and other key decision makers such as county commissioners or county executives. In a statewide effort, the policy team might include representatives from the state legislative, executive and judicial branches.

**Recommendation 7.** Strongly encourage each site to seriously consider having a community member on the policy team. NIC should help policy teams weigh the benefits and drawbacks to having community members involved on the policy teams and should help them make the best decision for their jurisdiction. If community members are included on the policy team, develop a plan for integrating them into the policy team and educating them about the justice system.

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**Recommendation 8.** Clarify the decision making authority of the policy team. If the policy team is a recommending body, assure that the policy team involves people who are in a decision making role or who can significantly influence those who will be making the decisions.

**Recommendation 9.** Ensure that the policy team is a manageable size and/or structured in a manner that will help it work together effectively and achieve results. We recommend that the size of policy teams be between 8 and 15 people. If the size exceeds 15 people, we recommend the use of a structure such as subcommittees or work groups to do specific work.

### **Recommendations For Start-Up Activities**

The beginning of a planning project such as the CJSP is a critical time. Initial project activities must be designed to assure that policy team members have: (1) a clear picture of the steps in the project and the expected interim and final outcomes of the project, (2) guidelines to govern how the policy team members will interact and make decisions, and (3) clear role definitions, including leadership. Below are recommendations with regard to the start-up activities of the CJSP.

**Recommendation 10.** Minimize the elapsed time between site selection and the start of the project. Seize early enthusiasm and momentum by starting up the projects within 4 to 6 weeks of selecting the sites.

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*Recommendation 11.* Orient the formal and informal leaders of the policy team to the project. Explain the need to collaborate and think system-wide, map out an approach that meets the needs and interests of the jurisdiction, and jointly customize the process to the jurisdiction.

*Recommendation 12.* Assure that the policy team leaders understand the need for both task and process leadership. Explain the importance of having both task and process leadership for an effective team. Provide leadership training as needed.

*Recommendation 13.* Orient all policy team members to the project early on, including (a) ensuring that they have a clear understanding of what they will be doing and the outcomes they are striving for and (b) ensuring that they are committed to the process and approach as described. Explain the approach, the process, what it will take to succeed at this type of work, the likely benefits to be gained, and what is expected of everyone and the site. Establish agreed upon ground rules for working together, agree on a meeting and project schedule, and identify expected project outcomes, goals, and mid-term milestones early in the project. Train everyone on collaboration principles and practices.

*Recommendation 14.* Teach members of the policy teams about collaboration and systems thinking. Teach members of the policy teams about the importance of taking a system-wide view of problems, to take into account how the actions of one agency can affect the work of other agencies.

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Assure that they understand how collaboration goes beyond cooperation, communication and coordination.

***Recommendation 15.*** Assess the support needs of the policy teams up front and ensure that they have the professional and administrative staff support and resources needed to coordinate project activities. For example, as needed assign a person to support the policy team and determine what other professional assistance the team is in need of. Clearly define the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of the professional and administrative staff.

***Recommendation 16.*** Define the roles and responsibilities of key people involved in the project. Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the site coordinator, the local site contact person, and the formal leader of the policy team. Take steps to ensure that each policy team receives a consistent and adequate level of support to complete its work.

***Recommendation 17.*** Assure an adequate level of presence by the site coordinator to provide effective facilitation for the policy team. At least during the first year of the project, substantial outside facilitation is likely to be necessary, to help the policy teams conduct the assessment and develop a long term plan, and to educate the policy teams on collaborative planning.

### **Recommendations For the Information Gathering Phase**

Promoting data-driven decision making was an important goal of the CJSP. An analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the criminal justice

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system in each site is a critical part of the project. Below are recommendations for the information gathering phase of the CJSP.

***Recommendation 18.*** Help sites develop a comprehensive data collection plan, including a matrix of data needs and data sources, before beginning the information and data gathering processes. Determine what information and data are needed to better understand the system, define what questions the policy team is attempting to answer, assess what data are available, and determine the best approach for gathering the information and data.

***Recommendation 19.*** Provide sites with a generic blueprint and other helpful tools such as templates and methods for collecting and analyzing local information.

***Recommendation 20.*** If outside consultants are needed, involve the teams actively in planning for and coordinating the activities of the external consultants. Gather the information systematically and synthesize the collective results and findings.

***Recommendation 21.*** Share the information, data, and findings from all assessment activities soon after the activities are completed.

***Recommendation 22.*** Present the assessment information, data, and findings in a written report or summary so that all policy team members have access to and see the same information. This helps all policy team members form a common understanding – or picture – of their criminal justice system.

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**Recommendation 23.** Provide targeted technical assistance such as data and statistical assistance, team building, presentations on best practices, and jail studies where there is a defined need. Take steps to ensure that the technical assistance provided is helpful to the site.

### **Recommendations For the Planning Phase**

A major goal of the CJSP was to assist sites in developing a strategic plan setting forth a road map for making justice system improvements in the future. The outcome of the planning phase should be a written plan that describes the collective vision of the site, the strategic issues and the long range objectives, and action plans for the initial stapes to be taken to implement the plan. Below are recommendations for the planning phase of the CJSP.

**Recommendation 24.** Teach members of the policy teams about strategic planning, including the importance of strategic planning, the benefits to be gained, how to engage in a planning process, and how to develop a long range plan. Help policy teams understand the importance of collectively developing (a) agreed upon values for the criminal justice system; (b) a common long term vision for the system; (c) one to five year goals for the system; and (d) short and long term strategies for improving the system.

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*Recommendation 25.* Encourage the members of the policy teams to focus on the long term strategic issues and strategies for addressing those issues, rather than just on short term problems.

*Recommendation 26.* Encourage teams to have a written document that summarizes their future direction, goals, and strategies.

*Recommendation 27.* Help the sites prepare to operationalize or implement their plan. Provide them with a variety of tools (e.g., action plans) and methods (e.g. implementation or action teams) for following through on their plans and for revising their plans at least annually. Help them establish first year priorities and complete action plans.

### **Recommendations For Maintaining Momentum**

Maintaining momentum is likely to be a major challenge for an extensive project such as the CJSP. It is difficult to sustain a process and keep leaders engaged when the process is lengthy. There are some proven techniques we believe would be useful for the CJSP to embrace to create a high level of focus on, commitment to, and enthusiasm for the project. The policy teams need to set goals, establish performance measures, monitor progress and performance relative to the goals and measures, and celebrate successes. Then the policy teams must hold themselves responsible for achieving short and long range goals. Below are recommendations for maintaining momentum throughout the CJSP.

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*Recommendation 28.* Maintain a reasonable pace of activities throughout the project. Avoid prolonged periods of inactivity.

*Recommendation 29.* Foster continuity from one meeting to the next by reminding policy team members of where they are in the process. In particular, continually show them where they are in the process, both what they have accomplished to date and what is coming up.

*Recommendation 30.* Using the policy team's agreed-upon process and written plan, review the team's progress periodically and celebrate progress, the achievement of interim goals/milestones, and outcomes or accomplishments. Modify the process and the written plans as needed.

*Recommendation 31.* Hold periodic retreats away from the site, where policy team members can work together without the distractions of daily office pressures.

*Recommendation 32.* Periodically assess how well the team is working together, whether the team is doing meaningful and productive things, and whether it is accomplishing what it intended to accomplish. Take steps to improve in these areas if necessary.

### **Recommendations For Creating the Capacity to Implement Change**

A critical issue for the CJSP is building the capacity for the site to continue the work of the policy team after the project ends and the facilitators leave. Learning how to ask the right questions and having tools for analyzing

problems is critical for creating a sustainable capacity to continue the work of the policy team. Below are recommendations with regard to creating the capacity to implement change.

*Recommendation 33.* Provide sites with tools and methods to help them follow through with and monitor changes and improvements. The project should leave the sites with the capability to conduct their own data analysis and system assessments on a continuing basis, to provide feedback as to the successes of changes to the criminal justice system.

*Recommendation 34.* Provide the sites with the tools to maintain a collaborative climate. As new people take over leadership positions in the criminal justice system, there must be a method for integrating them into the collaborative methods of the policy team.

*Recommendation 35.* Communicate results to the community and stakeholders and build ongoing support for short and long term change and improvement efforts. Help sites document the changes they have made to their criminal justice system and the resulting impacts to the community.

We believe that the above approach to information-based, collaborative, system-wide policy making will provide an effective method for jurisdictions seeking to rethink sanctioning policies and develop a more comprehensive criminal justice system policy.

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