

Creating Winning Innovations in Criminal Justice

by *Gail Christopher*



Photo source: PhotoDisc

Innovation may be more of a challenge in government than anywhere else. Proposals that depart from established ways of doing business may face objections from organizations or individuals wedded to the status quo. In the criminal justice system, innovation may be an even greater challenge. After all, crime can be a matter of life and death. Protecting citizens from crime and ensuring equitable treatment by the justice system are the overriding concerns. Because so much is at stake, policy debate can be acrimonious, public opinion sharply divided. Yet despite this, and despite the complexity and scope of the issues, innovative practices abound at all levels and in virtually every component of the criminal justice system, including arenas in which the problems seem insurmountable.

The Need

The decline in the crime rate notwithstanding, established ways no longer produce the desired results in many arenas of criminal justice. Reinvention, with its emphasis on performance, responsiveness, and customer service, is the new imperative and has been the catalyst for innovation.

Since its inception in 1986, the Ford Foundation's Innovations in American Government awards program has counted many criminal justice programs among its winners and finalists. (The most recently named award recipients are listed in "Notable Criminal Justice Innovators in 2000," page 26.) Outside that circle are uncounted others, at the local, State, and Federal levels, who also exemplify risk-taking, adaptability, and flexibility.

Lessons From Government Innovations

Innovative programs in criminal justice and elsewhere in government are born when staff and administrators face head-on the frustrations that can be common in the public sector. They find ways to overcome barriers and eliminate disincentives, and the best of them find ways to sustain their programs for the long term.

Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, which administers the Innovations program, has distilled the lessons learned from the winners in the 14 years since the program began.¹ Most, if not all, apply to criminal justice agencies, where they can serve as guidelines for seeking new solutions.

- Define a mission clearly and in terms of compelling public problems. Most award-winning government programs clearly articulate a purpose that is understood both inside and outside the organization. This sense of mission keeps the organization focused in the face of controversy, change, and daily routine.
- Define challenging but achievable outcomes against which to measure performance. Because results are what matter, setting outcome targets can motivate staff and mobilize support. If outcome measures

are clearly defined, the public is more likely to feel the agency is accountable.

- Collaborate with other agencies whenever possible. Shrinking resources and greater demand have spurred the search for creative ways to collaborate. Partnerships can help solve problems too complex for any single agency to handle.
- Build partnerships with the private and nonprofit sectors. Working alone, the government cannot solve all problems. Business and community nonprofits are often the best equipped to be catalysts and to help develop programs.
- Respect the talents of frontline workers. The prospect of innovation is enhanced when employees participate in decision making and when their experience informs practice. The business world knows this, and it is being applied increasingly in the public sector.

about the author

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- Identify clearly the citizens and groups entitled to your services and focus as sharply as possible on their needs. Many award-winning government programs have borrowed the customer service approach of the business world and are shifting their focus accordingly, from process to people.
- If the agency's tasks involve regulation, consider working with the regulated parties to meet common objectives through compliance, rather than depending entirely on traditional enforcement. Much discontent with government stems from stories of seemingly capricious, adversarial actions by regulatory agencies. Many agencies have adopted a more cooperative, problem-solving approach that involves a mutual focus on results and partnerships.
- Consider how market forces may complement the provision of public goods and services. In many areas of government, opportunities exist to improve service by being open to market forces. The interests of business may often dovetail well with those of government agencies.
- Use information technology to improve services to citizens. This area holds great potential for improving access to agencies and their programs. The government may lag behind the private sector, but it is now assiduously cultivating the use of telecommunications and information technologies to speed service and save resources.
- Be flexible, take risks, and don't give up. The Innovations program award recipients are always on the lookout to improve performance. They work collaboratively with multiple partners and are as patient as they are energetic in planning and improvising toward their goals.

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Note

1. Based on the paper by Alan Altshuler, "Ten Lessons From Innovations," *Innovations in American Government, 1986–1996, Tenth Anniversary*, New York: Ford Foundation, December 1996: 8–11. The complete essay is available on the Innovations Web site: <http://www.innovations.harvard.edu/essays.htm>.

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Notable Criminal Justice Innovators in 2000

INNOVATIONS IN AMERICAN GOVERNMENT



The Innovations in American Government Program, which began in 1986, identifies outstanding examples of creative problem-solving in the public sector at the

local, State, and Federal levels. Administered by Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and managed by the Council for Excellence in Government, the program each year names 10 winners and 15 finalists. Each receives a Ford Foundation grant.

Information about the program and instructional materials

in the form of case studies of award-winning programs are on the Innovations Web site, at <http://www.innovations.harvard.edu/index.html>.

Of the winners and finalists in the 2000 competition, four were in the field of criminal justice. The following programs were named the winner and finalists:

W I N N E R

Healthier Inmates Can
Mean a Healthier
Community

"Public Health Model for Corrections"

*Hampden County,
Massachusetts, Sheriff's
Department*

Inmates' limited access to health care before incarceration, along with impulsive or risky behavior, contributes to a disproportionate prevalence of disease among them. Once discharged, they could potentially be a public health risk. The Hampden County, Massachusetts, Sheriff's Department developed a public health model of care that responds to the concerns of the community and also meets the medical needs of jail inmates.

The model helps inmates lead healthier lives in jail and when released. Medical service is provided contractually with nonprofit neighborhood health centers. Inmates are assigned to a team of doctors and case managers from

the centers who provide care onsite at the jail and after release. Program elements include assessment, long-term treatment, education, and case management with postrelease links to the community. For more information, contact:

Dr. Thomas Conklin
Hampden County Sheriff's
Department
627 Randall Road
Ludlow, MA 01056-1079
Phone: 413-547-8000, ext. 2344
Fax: 413-589-0912

Public Health Model for Corrections—

Inmates' limited access to health care before incarceration, along with impulsive or risky behavior, contributes to a disproportionate prevalence of disease among them. Once discharged, they could potentially be a public health risk.

FINALISTS

Community Program
Keeps Young Offenders
Out of State Institutions

“Community Youth Investment Program”

*Deschutes County, Oregon,
Commission on Children and
Families and Department of
Juvenile Community Justice*

Placing young people who commit nonviolent crimes in State institutions can do more harm than good for both the offender and the community. Deschutes County's Community Youth Investment Program (CYIP) is an alternative way to help youthful offenders while saving the county money.

The young people participate in a highly structured program that holds them accountable for their offenses while teaching them responsibility and requiring restitution and community service.

In return, the county earns money for every bed it does not use in a State facility that would otherwise house these offenders.

As a result of the program, the county's incarceration rate for young people dropped from 23 in 1997, the year before CYIP began, to 5 in 2000. The county earned funds for use in early intervention programs, proven to reduce juvenile crime. For more information, contact:

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Community Justice
Deschutes County
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Bend, OR 97701
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Research and Data Used
to Identify Risk and
Prevent Juvenile
Offending

“Risk-Focused Policing”

*City of Redlands, California,
Police Department*

Redlands, California, began consolidating its police, recreation, and housing services in 1997 in an attempt to reduce factors that put young people at risk for delinquency, substance abuse, dropping out of school, and teen pregnancy.

The Redlands Police Department is the first in the country to fully embrace a research-based prevention framework, focused on risk and protective factors. In this data-driven strategy, the department, working with the local school district, measures community, family, school, and peer group risk factors and develops comprehensive responses.

Through recreation center and afterschool programs, Redlands has served thousands of young people. Since program implementation, major crime has decreased 36 percent. After a police officer was assigned to the local drug court, participation in the program among youth increased 70 percent, and drug court recidivism dropped as much as 6 percent. For more information contact:

Chief Jim Bueermann
Redlands Police Department
30 Cajon Street
Redlands, CA 92373
Phone: 909-798-7661
Email: JBueermann@aol.com

Inmate-on-Inmate
Violence Reduced

“Total Efficiency Accountability Management System (TEAMS)”

*New York City Department of
Correction*

New York City jails have been transformed into a safer and more habitable environment through the reduction of inmate-on-inmate violence. The city's Department of Correction accomplished this through its Total Efficiency Accountability Management System (TEAMS), introduced in 1996 to address growing inmate violence, staff absenteeism, and low morale and to control employee use of overtime.

TEAMS holds managers accountable while emphasizing goal-oriented management and job performance of correctional officers. An information collection system was created to measure performance throughout the agency. Since TEAMS began, inmate violence has fallen 93 percent and employee absenteeism more than 30 percent. Staff spend less time responding to violent and dangerous incidents and more time improving inmate services. For more information, contact:

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