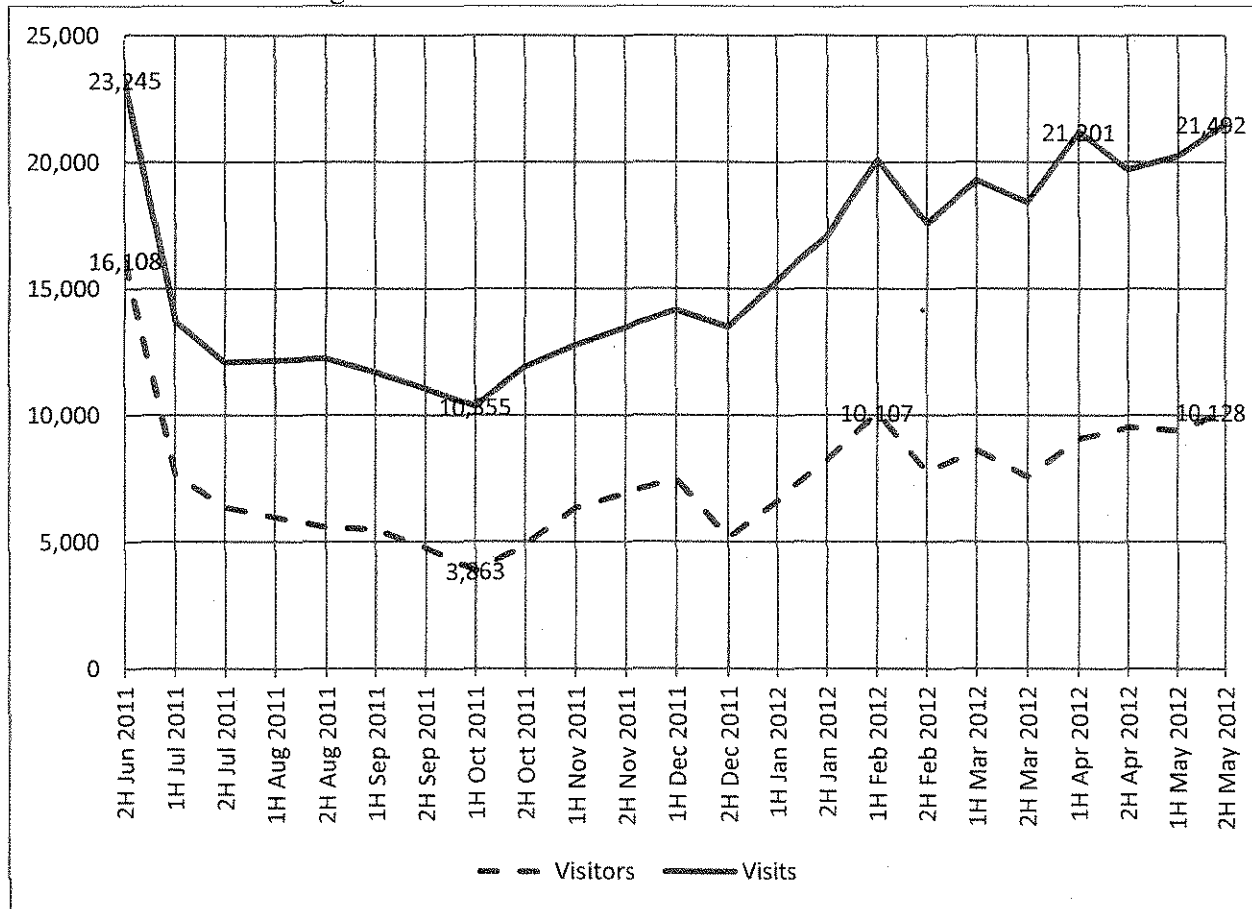


Office of Justice Programs Responses to Recommendations From the OJP Science Advisory Board Evidence-Translation and Integration Subcommittee

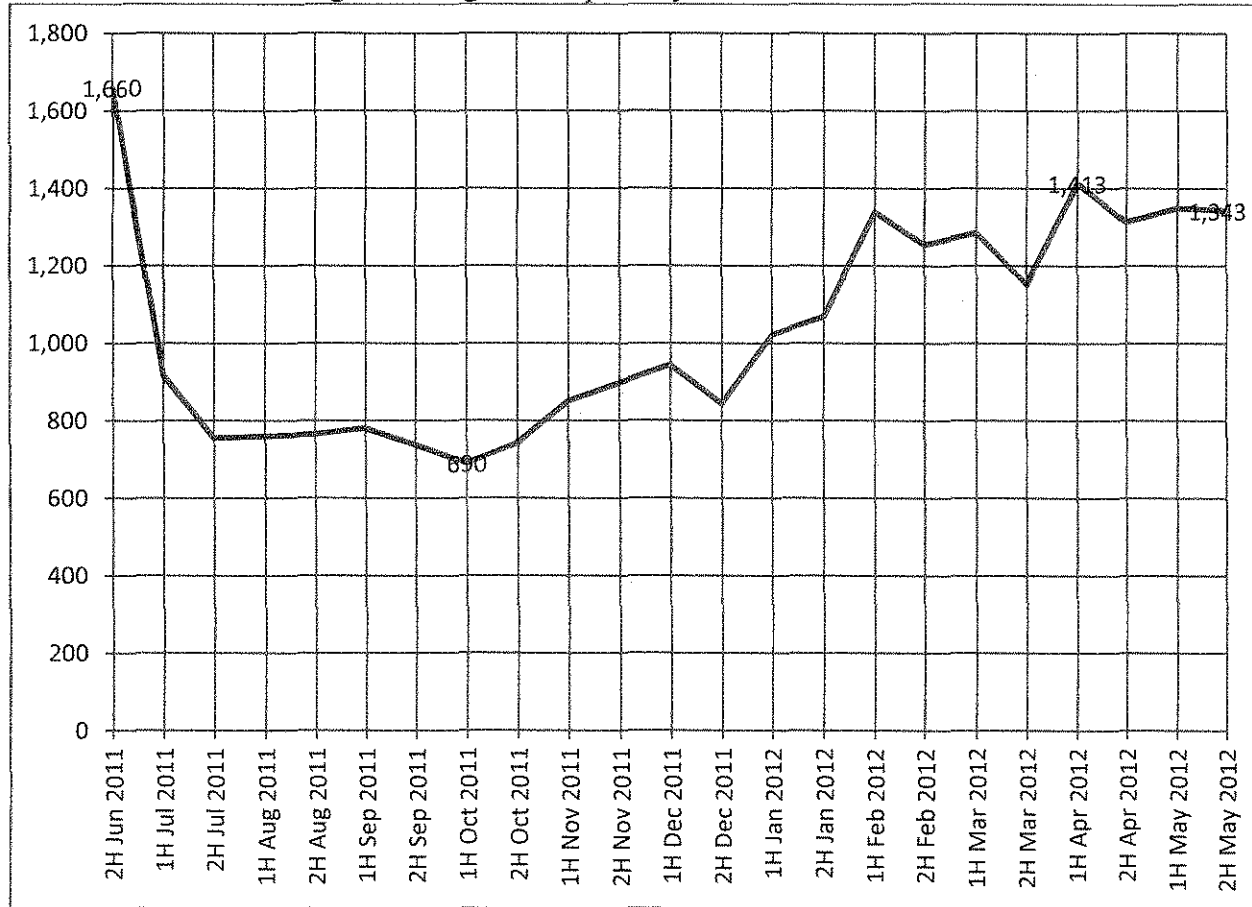
OJP thanks the Subcommittee members for their insightful report and thoughtful recommendations. As most of the recommendations focus on the CrimeSolutions.gov website, a few updates on the website are in order. First, CrimeSolutions.gov recently surpassed the milestone of posting 200 programs. As of June 12, 2012, the website includes 63 programs rated “Effective,” 119 programs rated “Promising,” and 21 programs rated “No Effects,” for a total of 203 programs. Second, the website was recently recognized with the Silver Award of Distinction in the 2012 Communicators Award competition for its qualities in conveying complex information in ways that are accessible to a broad audience. In April and May of 2012, the website had over 40,000 visits from over 18,500 visitors each month (see chart 1). CrimeSolutions.gov averaged over 1,300 visitors per day in these months (see chart 2).

Chart 1: CrimeSolutions.gov Visits and Visitors



Note: 1H refers to the first 15 days of the month. 2H refers to the remaining days of the month.

Chart 2: CrimeSolutions.gov Average Visits per Day



Note: 1H refers to the first 15 days of the month. 2H refers to the remaining days of the month.

Recommendation #1: An attempt should be made to explore how studies on CrimeSolutions.gov are influenced by which kinds of programs are funded and, in particular, by whether the evaluations are undertaken by researchers who implement the programs.

This is a two part recommendation. The first part poses the question of how the flow of program funding influences the topical distribution of programs that appear on CrimeSolutions.gov. The second part poses the question of whether there is independence between those who implement (or presumably develop) programs, and those that evaluate the same programs.

OJP does not feel the analysis required for the first part of this recommendation will yield information of sufficient value to justify the expense of conducting it. To answer the first question, it would be necessary to conduct an analysis of program funding over the same period of time that is captured by the evaluations that may be assessed on CrimeSolutions.gov. Evaluations with publication dates of 1980 or more recently are eligible for review under the temporal criteria for CrimeSolutions.gov. Thus, the proposed analysis would require a review of program funding for over three decades. Further, the largest federal funding streams in dollar amounts also tend to be the most general in their applicability. Therefore, it would be difficult to

draw any conclusions from variations in funding levels for a program like BJA's Justice Assistance Grants or OJJDP's Juvenile Accountability Block Grants, for example.

On the second part, CrimeSolutions.gov has not established evaluator independence as an exclusion criterion. Therefore, it is possible for a program to appear on CrimeSolutions.gov even if the same person has been involved in developing, implementing, and evaluating the program. This is the case with a very well-known and respected program called Nurse Family Partnerships. The program is rated as Effective on CrimeSolutions.gov. It is also one of the "Model Blueprints for Violence Prevention" as rated by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado. The same program is listed as a "Top Tier" initiative by the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy.

Recommendation #2: As studies accumulate, the category of "No Effects" might be subdivided into "null effects" and "negative effects: (i.e., increase crime/recidivism).

As of June 11, 2012 there are 21 programs rated as "No Effects" on CrimeSolutions.gov. Three of these programs produced negative effects in the evaluation. The remaining 18 produced null effects. The negative effects programs are clearly identified in both the summary program description found on the search results page and the full description found in the program profile. While OJP may consider the recommendation in the future as the numbers increase, we have not taken that step at the present time.

Recommendation #3: An attempt should be made to determine how the intent and evaluation process of CrimeSolutions.gov yields relatively few studies in the "No Effects" category.

First, it should be recognized that the evidence threshold for "No Effects" is equivalent to the evidence threshold for "Effective." The only difference is the degree and direction of the outcome findings. Both "No Effects" and "Effective" ratings require a more rigorous level of evidence than the "Promising" rating. As a result, CrimeSolutions.gov is, by design, tilted in the direction of positive findings. But even so, there are three times as many "Effective" programs as "No Effects." We believe this is largely due to differences in the literature of published and otherwise available evaluations. Although OJP has not analyzed this question directly, it seems unsurprising to imagine that there are at least three times as many positive outcome evaluations published as null or negative outcome evaluations. Indeed, a number of the programs currently on the "No Effects" list were originally published by the evaluators as programs with positive outcomes. In these cases, CrimeSolutions.gov reviewers weighed the balance of evidence differently and provided "No Effects" ratings.

The selection of programs to be moved into the CrimeSolutions.gov review process is based on a number of factors. First, the rate of reviews that are completed is determined in part by the budget and the terms of the contract for the social science review. Development Services Group (DSG) was funded to produce 125 reviews for posting in the first contract year and 60 additional reviews in each subsequent contract year. This number was surpassed in the initial year and the

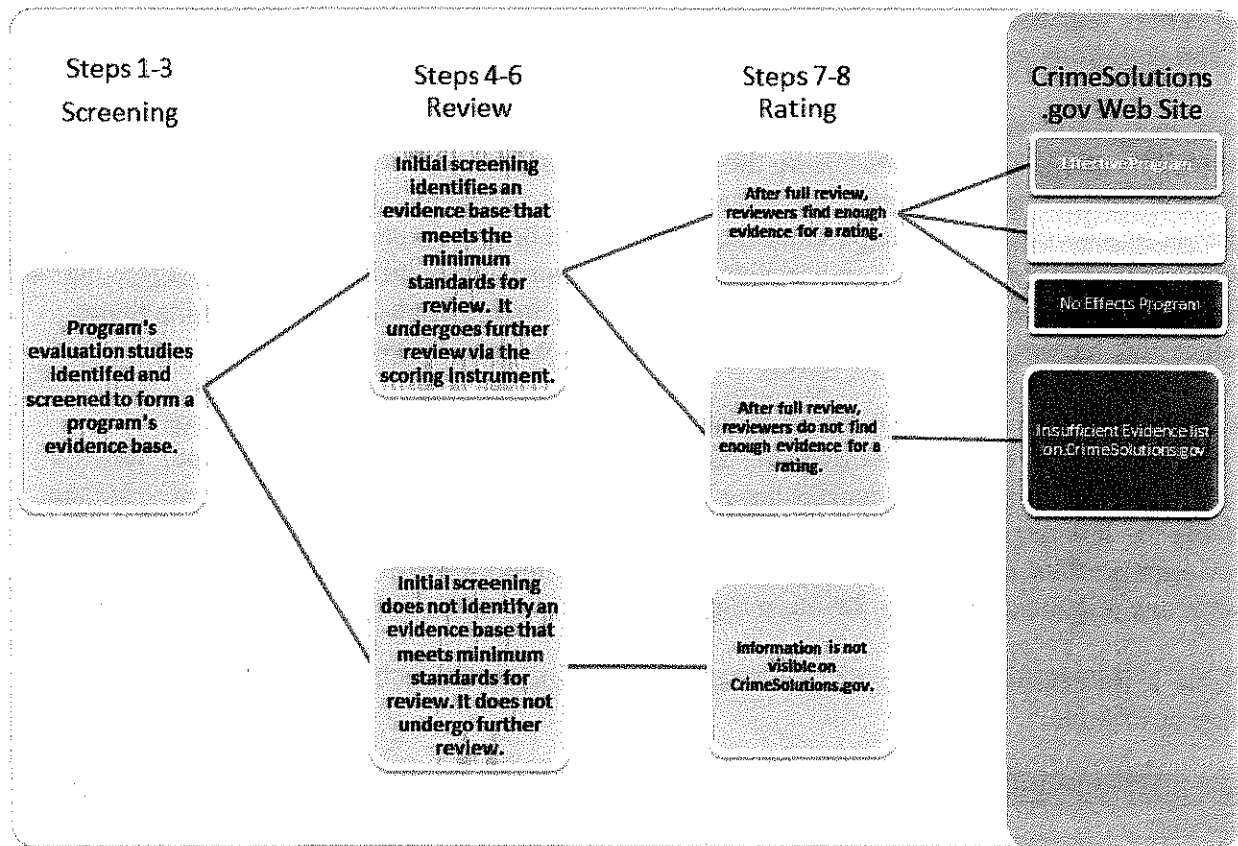
website launched with over 140 programs. In the second (current) year, the total was modified downward to free up resources to produce the meta-analysis module that is currently in production (see below). Nevertheless, more than 60 reviews have already been conducted in the second year because OJP was able to leverage some additional funding made available by OJJDP.

The OJJDP resources were directed toward re-reviewing programs that appeared in the OJJDP Model Programs Guide (MPG). This was done for two reasons. First, OJP is working toward a strategy of aligning all of the evidence reviews in MPG with the reviews in CrimeSolutions.gov (that uses a higher evidence standard). Second, MPG programs have already been reviewed once (albeit under different criteria) so they were deemed a likely source for new programs that would meet evidence criteria for CrimeSolutions.gov. However, MPG does not include listings for programs with null or negative effects. Therefore, the result of this decision may have contributed to the continuing low percentage of “No Effects” programs.

Recommendation #4: The category of “Insufficient Evidence” should be made more informative and consumer friendly. CrimeSolutions.gov should have a more informative statement as to how programs arrive on this list by incorporating and updating the flowchart for the selection criteria. It should be clearer that some programs never made it beyond the initial screening process and that, among those that did, some were then judged to lack sufficient evidence.

We are revising the text for the Insufficient Evidence page. We have also drafted a new flowchart to help users understand the process (see chart 3). The text modifications will be posted in June of 2012; the graphic in chart 3 may be somewhat later in the summer of 2012.

Chart 3: Draft Graphic for Describing Review and Rating of Evidence on CrimeSolutions.gov



Recommendation #5: In the short term, the CrimeSolutions.gov website should contain clearly explained links to other OJP or OJP-sponsored “what works” sites that also engage in the translation of evidence.

The text leading up to this recommendation noted early descriptive information about CrimeSolutions.gov in which the terms “single, credible” resource were used. Due in part to comments and concerns raised by the Science Advisory Board, the term “single” has been eliminated from current descriptive materials. OJP acknowledges that there will continue to be multiple OJP-sponsored websites offering information and evidence for practitioners and policy makers.

Each of the component websites is linked from CrimeSolutions.gov in the section labeled “Research at OJP” http://www.crimesolutions.gov/OJPResearch.aspx?Research_ID=5 . The Model Programs Guide and the Reentry Research Clearinghouse are also linked off of CrimeSolutions.gov under a link for “Other Evidence Based Program Libraries” http://www.crimesolutions.gov/about_otherlibraries.aspx . We are in the process of reorganizing this information and other content under a single tab that will be labeled “Resources” and will be accessible from the top menu bar that is accessible from every page of the website.

Recommendation #6: A systematic review should be undertaken and then institutionalized to ensure that the information on all OJP or OJP-sponsored websites, including Crimesolutions.com, is consistent.

OJP and OJJDP are currently carrying out a systematic re-review of every program under the Model Programs Guide (MPG) using the more rigorous standards of CrimeSolutions.gov. As these re-reviews are completed, the programs are being posted on CrimeSolutions.gov. When the process is complete, a single database will underlie both CrimeSolutions.gov and MPG. The MPG will then shift to a new online platform that is consistent with CrimeSolutions.gov, but will have additional peripheral content targeted to juvenile justice users (e.g., information about which risk factors programs address that will allow new search capabilities).

MPG currently includes three evidence rating levels: “Exemplary,” “Effective,” and “Promising.” All of the re-reviews for “Exemplary” programs have been completed. Re-reviews of the remaining categories have begun and will be completed over the next year (see Table 1). It is too early to predict how many of the remaining 155 MPG programs will result in program profiles on CrimeSolutions.gov, but the emerging pattern of results is consistent with what one might expect given the more rigorous standards of the CrimeSolutions.gov review.

Table 1: Re-review of Programs Listed on Model Programs Guide Using CrimeSolutions.gov Rating Criteria

CrimeSolutions.gov Rating	MPG Exemplary	MPG Effective	MPG Promising
Effective	19	3	1
Promising	15	8	10
No Effects	5	0	0
Insufficient Evidence	0	4	2
Total Re-Reviewed	39	15	13
Remaining to be Re-Reviewed	0	66	89

Beyond the alignment of MPG, OJP has identified no method for aligning other reviews with CrimeSolutions.gov other than to re-review those programs using CrimeSolutions.gov standards and review procedures. Different standards and review procedures produce somewhat different results. The What Works in Reentry Clearinghouse is a case in point. Although there are a number of critical similarities between the standards and procedures with CrimeSolutions.gov (e.g., inclusion of only randomized experimental designs and high quality quasi-experimental designs), differences in the aggregation and interpretation of individual study findings can lead to different conclusions. As of June 11, 2012, the What Works in Reentry Clearinghouse includes 11 name brand programs. Nine of these programs have also been reviewed under CrimeSolutions.gov standards. Eight of these are rated consistently by the two projects, although there are some differences in terms of degree. For example, The ComAlert program is rated as “strong evidence of beneficial effect” on the What Works in Reentry Clearinghouse and it is rated as “Promising” (not “Effective”) by CrimeSolutions.gov. In one other case, the What Works in Reentry Clearinghouse rates a program as “strong evidence of beneficial effect” while CrimeSolutions.gov reviewers rated it as having insufficient evidence.

The only definitive method for fully consistent content across websites is to demand that all content is reviewed with the exact same standards and procedures. That has not been done to date in part because multiple parallel projects were in development at the time the CrimeSolutions.gov was also in development. Going forward, we expect to have greater consistency.

Recommendation #7: OJP should explore other websites for programs that are listed (especially as effective) on these sites but not included in CrimeSolutions.gov. These programs should be entered into the review process of CrimeSolutions.gov.

This is already being done. Examples of websites and information sources that CrimeSolutions.gov has reviewed include: (1) Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse; (2) the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Registry of Evidence Based Programs and Practices; (3) OJJDP's Model Programs Guide; (4) OJP's Report on Preventing Crime: What Works, What's Promising, and What Doesn't; (5) the Campbell Collaboration's systematic reviews; and (6) the Guide to Community Preventive Services published by the Centers for Disease Control.

As noted above, referencing other websites that typically do not include information on null and negative effects programs is one possible source of the imbalance seen between "No Effects" listings and "Effective" listings on CrimeSolutions.gov

Recommendation #8: In the long term, OJP should consider integrating all websites under the umbrella of CrimeSolutions.gov.

This is a step that OJP is unlikely to take. CrimeSolutions.gov has a specific purpose to provide information about causal evidence, or evidence about the effectiveness of given programs or practices. This is a tall order and there is much that can be done to continue to build on the strong platform that has been built for CrimeSolutions.gov.

Other OJP websites also present evidence. But there are many kinds of evidence that are not causal in nature. For example, BJS produces statistical information and hosts a highly regarded website displaying those statistical findings. OJP is not inclined to integrate that content under CrimeSolutions.gov. Further, NIJ hosts a high quality website that presents evidence as well, but again, it goes beyond just causal evidence and has a more flexible platform to deliver content.

OJP expects that we will continue to have multiple websites that display evidence for our constituents. However, we will continue to work to coordinate content across these websites. For example, CrimeSolutions.gov is providing web services to the BJA website so that topical pages can directly display CrimeSolutions.gov content on evidence-based programs.

Recommendation #9: An effort should be made to develop a section on CrimeSolutions.gov that communicates empirically supported principles of effective intervention or effective program components in the various subject areas.

This is a laudable recommendation. It presents both methodological and logistical challenges. From a methodological standpoint, the question is what counts as being “empirically supported?” One way to answer that question is to look to the results of meta-analytic studies. We are taking that step, as described below. Another way to address this would be to use a more qualitative approach to deciphering “best practices” based on the results of rigorous research. We have done this in conference presentations. For example, at the American Society of Criminology conference in November of 2011, Dr. Ed LaTessa presented on principles of effective intervention based on the impressions of senior researchers involved in CrimeSolutions.gov. It was very well received. However, some might argue that we are going beyond the evidence and into the realm of informed opinion when we extract program elements from information about programs that have been found to be promising or effective overall.

The logistical challenge is that for CrimeSolutions.gov to support this recommendation in a uniform way across the full scope of topics will require a well-funded and well organized effort that goes beyond the current intended scope of the website.

Recommendation #10: Beyond evaluations of individual studies, meta-analyses should be relied upon in reporting on the components of effective interventions.

We are currently in the process of developing a new module in CrimeSolutions.gov that will focus on assembling, assessing, and presenting the results from meta-analyses. The social science contractor for CrimeSolutions.gov, Development Services Group (DSG), has contracted with two leading figures in the field of meta-analysis to support this work: Dr. Mark Lipsey of Vanderbilt University (also a member of OJP’s Science Advisory Board) and Dr. David Wilson of George Mason University. Both are also participants and contributors to the work of the Campbell Collaboration that has contributed much to the advancement of meta-analysis in the field of justice.

This work has included developing (1) an overall conception of “practices” as opposed to name brand programs; (2) screening criteria for meta-analysis research; and (3) scoring instruments. We are also in the initial stages of developing the presentation and display of meta-analysis results for the website. The meta-analysis (or “practices”) module is scheduled to be launched in October of 2012.

Recommendation #11: OJP should develop a communications plan to publicize Crmesolutions.gov.

OJP has developed a communications plan that it continues to implement. It includes mass and targeted email messaging, webinars, tweets, more traditional periodical publications, and in person messaging at meetings and conferences. For example, the March 2012 NIJ Journal

included an article on CrimeSolutions.gov, and this work will be featured at an OJP on the Hill meeting for Congressional members and staffers in June. Information about CrimeSolutions.gov is included on the OJP funding solicitation template (although it is not included in every announcement if it is not relevant to the specific intended purposes). We recently conducted an online interview with an organization serving criminology undergraduate and graduate students. We feel that the trend lines in Chart 1 and Chart 2 reflect a certain level of success in increasing the visibility and usage. However, we continue to work to get the word out about the existence and utility of CrimeSolutions.gov.

Recommendation #12: OJP should conduct a detailed survey and focus groups to obtain comprehensive feedback on the use and utility of CrimeSolutions.gov.

Although OJP agrees with this recommendation and sees the potential value in it, this step has not yet been taken. We are likely to revisit this recommendation in the next fiscal year after the completion and launch of the meta-analysis/practices module.

Recommendation #13: OJP should expand reach of “hyper-links” back to CrimeSolutions.gov. Presently, there are 93 hyper-links (e.g., link form dc.state.fl.us)

Since these recommendations were submitted, an additional 40 websites have added links to CrimeSolutions.gov, bringing the current number of websites back-linking to 133. This summer CrimeSolutions.gov will be adding a “Resources” page to CrimeSolutions.gov. This will include specific instructions for program developer websites that want to acknowledge their rating and inclusion on CrimeSolutions.gov. It will also include a “widget” that is a small piece of programming code that web masters can add to their own website. This code will display a CrimeSolutions.gov “widget” on their website that will display the CrimeSolutions.gov logo, provide a brief (1 sentence) overview of CrimeSolutions.gov, and list the five (5) programs that were most recently posted to CrimeSolutions.gov. The program title (linked to the program profile page) and the program rating icon will be captured and displayed for each.

Recommendation #14: OJP should systematically assess the capacity of the planned Diagnostic Center to provide meaningful technical assistance.

The OJP Diagnostic Center is currently in its pilot phase, where we are taking on a limited number of engagements to test our procedures and protocols and assess the efficacy of Diagnostic Center technical assistance in the communities it serves. There is an ongoing assessment loop, where federal staff and contract staff review process outcomes and use client feedback and outcome data to adjust Diagnostic Center procedures. In addition, each Diagnostic Center engagement includes both an internal process evaluation and an independent impact evaluation. The first of these evaluations will be completed in fall 2012 after the first pilot engagements are concluded. OJP looks forward to briefing the Science Advisory Board on these engagements, and welcomes your feedback in how to manage and sustain this initiative.

Recommendation #15: OJP should explore ways to advance the notion that criminal justice is a profession marked by ethics, standards of practice, and the use of scientific expertise.

As noted in the Subcommittee report, this is a very broad issue. OJP takes a variety of steps to advance ethical practice, high standards of practice, and the use of scientific expertise and knowledge in criminal justice, juvenile justice, and crime victim services. NIJ's emphasis on translational criminology is but one example. We recognize that there is more that we can do on this front and look forward to continuing to work with the Science Advisory Board to identify priority areas and develop responses.