Outputs & Outcomes: Measuring & Evaluating a Problem Solving Court Initiative

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Don’t Become an “Accidental” Evaluator

Validating and applying evidence based best practices has become a critical issue for criminal justice system practitioners generally, and for problem solving courts practitioners specifically. But developing and validating a problem solving court initiative as a best practice does not happen by accident. It takes careful planning and execution of a outcome measures and evaluation plan.
Audience Poll #1

Why are you here?

a). You are involved in a problem solving court effort and want to learn more about how to evaluate it.

b). You are genuinely interested in the topic of evaluation, but don’t know much about it.

c). You know a fair amount about evaluation, but you don’t know how to apply it to a problem solving court initiative.

d). You actually meant to be in the breakout on Military Culture but you misread the breakout room name.
Why Am I Here?
In this presentation, we will talk about:

• The importance of early development of the output/outcome measures needed to assess the impact of a problem solving court initiative.

• Where to look for evaluation help & how to use it.

• What output & outcome measures are & how to build them.

• How to use output measures to plan your effort or improve your program’s operations.

• Some of the challenges you face in doing an evaluation.

• How to successfully complete an evaluation and utilize its results to support your initiative.
Stop the Presses!
Are You Ready For An Evaluation?

Doing an Evaluability Assessment:
Some Common Questions

• Does a formal program design exist (with documented goals & objectives)?
• Is your program’s logic model sound & plausible?
• Can you collect or extract the data you need to complete it?
• Can you complete the evaluation in a timeframe useful for decision making?
• Would the results be useful to the academic community & advance the scientific inquiry into a topic of importance?
Stop the Presses  
Are You Ready For An Evaluation?

Some Common Questions Continued

• Would the results of an evaluation be useful to decision makers and practitioners?
• Do you have the resources needed (money, staff, and time) to complete it?
• Do other sources already document the value and utility of your project?
• Is there agency, government, academic, or community support for doing an evaluation?

If the answers to many of these questions are no, you probably are not ready to do an evaluation.
Audience Poll #2
When is the best time to think about evaluating your problem solving court initiative?

a). Once you have received the funding to hire a professional evaluator.
b). After you have operated the program for a while and have some program data to analyze.
c). When your fiscal agent or funding authority asks for proof that your program is working?
d). All of the above.
Correct Answer

EARLY AND OFTEN!
Why?

• Thinking about how to evaluate a project can actually help you more effectively plan it.
• Data needed to evaluate a project may become more difficult, expensive, or impossible to obtain.
• Data can help you detect or monitor problems in the implementation or operation of your program.
• Data can help you plan for or adjust the resources needed to operate your program.
When is the best time to engage an evaluator?

- **Best Case Scenario:** Early and often throughout program planning, implementation, and operations.
- **1st Fallback position:** Intermittently throughout program planning, implementation, and operations.
- **2nd Fallback position:** Early in planning and later in operations.
- **Worst Case Scenario:** Late in the operational stages of your program or not at all.

[It is not necessarily an all or nothing proposition]
Where can you find help in evaluating your project?

• Within your own organization.
• Within your project partners’ organizations.
• At local colleges and universities, particularly within their Schools of Social Work, Criminal Justice, and Public Policy.
• Look to evaluation resources.
• Look to your fiscal agents or funders for funding one.
• Look to foundation financial support to hire one.
• Look at grant opportunities, both state & federal, to hire one.
• Look to evaluation professionals.
Audience Poll #3
Why is working with an evaluator a scary experience?

a). They frequently speak in a language you don’t understand.

b). They have this nasty “professional independence” streak.

c). They have this voracious appetite for “data” and “control groups.”

d). The experience is costly and time consuming.

e). All of the above and more.
Some practical tips for working with an evaluator

• Manage the relationship. You are the client.
• Learn & teach the lingo. Clear communication is critical.
• Be explicit about mutual expectations & responsibilities.
• Respect each other’s time, expertise & professional independence.
• Be prepared to ask questions, learn, and teach.
**Objectives**
Expected achievements that are well-defined, specific, and measurable.

**Resources**
Means available to achieve the objectives. (i.e. Staff & $'s.)

**Activities**
Program efforts conducted to achieve the objectives.

**Process Measures**
Data used to demonstrate the implementation of activities. Includes products of activities and indicators of services provided.

**Outcomes**
Actual changes that result from Goals & Objectives. Can be intended or unintended. Changes can be:
- Initial
- Intermediate
- Long Term

**External Factors**
A program operates in a larger system that affects program operations, outputs, and outcomes.

See: https://www.bja.gov/evaluation/guide/pe4.htm
Output measures are data used to demonstrate the implementation of activities, including the products of activities and indicators of services provided. They provide documentation of whether a program is being implemented as designed or was planned consistently with what might actually be needed.

Outcome measures are data used to demonstrate actual change within the target population of the program that are directly related to its goal(s) and objectives. They provide documentation of whether a program is having the desired impact on the identified problem.
Problem Statement

The downtown core of a large city is plagued with a large number of chronic, low level offenders who commit misdemeanor “quality of life” offenses (i.e.: shoplifting, prostitution, trespassing, public urination, drinking in public) that degrade public safety and quality of life of people living, working, and visiting the downtown core. Many of these offenders are 1). drug or alcohol involved; 2). suffer from mental and physical problems; 3). are unemployed; and/or 4). are homeless.

Traditional court processes have generally failed with this population and the public has lost confidence in the city’s ability to do anything about it. If out of custody, these offenders frequently fail to appear at court when required, rarely comply with probation conditions, and often commit new offenses even before previous ones are adjudicated. Frustrated judges variously give them credit for time served or significant sentences upon probation failure. This leads to an endless cycle of offenses, warrants for failure to appear, failed probations, and jail time.
The Proposed Solution: A Problem Solving Community Court

Key Goals:
• Improve public safety and community livability in the downtown core.
• Improved case outcomes for offenders & the public.
• Reduced system costs.

Key Objectives
• Reduce total number of the targeted offenses.
• Reduce the rate of offender recidivism.
• Increase offender “restitution” to impacted target area.
• Improve community perception of safety & quality of life.
• Reduce pre-adjudication case processing time for cases involving chronic, low level, “quality of life” offenders.
• Increase offender utilization of social services help.
• Reduce the jail costs associated with these offenders.
Let’s identify some potential output measures

• # of potential clients screened for eligibility
• # of clients offered the program
• # of clients who “opted in” (accepted) the program
• # of clients completing the program
• # of clients needing mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, alcohol abuse treatment, housing assistance, physical health services, employment assistance, sustenance assistance
• # of clients referred to resources to address the above needs
• # of hours of community service ordered
• # of hours completed
• # of participants by demographics (race, gender, age cohorts, language used, veteran’s status)
Using Output Data in the Planning Process

Once the eligibility criteria for a project and a screening tool for assessing social services needs has been developed, you can pilot both on a pre-implementation sample population (or in a limited pilot project) to estimate the likely volume of:

1. The court’s calendar
2. The social services referral “slots” you will need
3. The community service hours “slots” you will need

A Community Court Example

The sample population produced the following results: 75 people/month were screened, with 60 being deemed eligible. Of those 60, 60% were homeless, 50% were alcohol involved, 40% were drug involved, and 25% were mentally ill.
Using Output Data in the Planning Process

N=60

• 60 X 60% = 36 people need housing assistance
• 60 X 50% = 30 people need alcohol treatment
• 60 X 40% = 24 people need drug treatment
• 60 X 25% = 15 people need mental health treatment

• 900 hours of community service needs to be planned for assuming 16 hrs/offender

• And the Court calendar would be about 60 people/month

(all discounted by the estimated opt-out rate)
Using Output Data to Help Educate Relevant Audiences About Your Program

Number of Hours of Community Service Performed 2005-2009

Number of Community Court Defendants 2005-2009

2015 Arizona Problem Solving Court Conference
Prescott, AZ
April 27-28, 2015
Reporting it in a form that will be more compelling to your audiences.
Using Output Data to Help Monitor Program Operations

Output data can be converted into useful program metrics that can be used to monitor program operations and detect problems:

- # of potential clients screened for eligibility
- # of clients offered the program
- # of clients who “opted in” (accepted) the program

Offer rate = # offered ÷ # screened

Opt In rate = # “opted ins” ÷ # offered

Screened Volume = # screened
Let’s identify some potential outcome measures

• reduction in the rate of reoffending
• reduction in the rate of targeted offenses
• changes in citizen perception of safety and community livability
• changes in offender perceptions of procedural justice of a court proceeding
• reduction in the costs of incarceration
• reduced rate of offender alcohol or drug use
Audience Poll #4
What are the challenges to evaluating a problem solving court initiative?

a). When is a control group necessary and where can I find one?
b). What is the appropriate research design?
c). How long a time period do I need to look at data?
d). Where is that data hiding and how do I find it?
e). How do I evaluate a program when I am already having trouble just trying to manage it.
f). All of the above, and many more.
# Research Designs

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<th>X=treatment</th>
<th>O=observation</th>
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<td>One Shot Case Study</td>
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Challenges to the Internal Validity of a Research Design

- History
- Maturation
- Testing
- Instrumentation
- Regression
- Selection
- Mortality
- Interaction of Selection/Maturation
Evaluation Challenges

Developing an Appropriate Research Design

A group exercise
Evaluation Challenges

Developing the Control or Comparison Group

A group exercise
Evaluation Challenges

Capturing & Maintaining Data

A group exercise
Evaluation Challenges

Defining Your Terms

A group exercise
Lessons learned from the group exercises
Completing The Evaluation: Some Practical Tips

• Revisit the evaluability assessment.
• An evaluation is a project. Use good project management skills to bring it to fruition.
• Develop a realistic timeline with interim deliverables.
• Maintain effective communication.
• Troubleshoot problems as they occur.
• Work collaboratively on reporting the findings.
• Bring the project home.
So you have an evaluation report. Now what?

- Develop a strategy for how you want to use the report.
- Extract digestible talking points summarizing the key findings.
- Use them to build audience appropriate materials that can be used to educate relevant audiences about the report’s findings.

Think About:

Press Releases
Funder Briefings
Community Briefings
Annual Reports
Newsletters
Websites
Examples

Extracts from a press release announcing the finding of an outcome study of a community court:

“A recently completely outcome evaluation by the Justice Management Institute of Denver, Colorado, has concluded that Seattle Community Court defendants experienced a 60% reduction in the frequency of their criminal reoffending in the 18 months following their community court intervention.”

“When the rate of reoffending was examined, it was clear that offenders in community court re-offend at a significantly lower rate than offenders who proceed through the traditional court process.” said JMI's Vice President Elaine Nugent-Borkorave, the study’s principle researcher.”
“This finding in and of itself represents a potential tremendous cost-saving to the city of Seattle. Given that most of the offenders are held in jail at the time of their arrest, fewer arrests among the community court participants translates into a decrease in scarce and expensive jail bed usage.” says Nugent-Bokorave.

“The Court’s Executive Committee hailed the study’s findings in a joint press release issued on October 29th. “We had an intuitive sense seeing these defendants going through our court day in and day out that we were making a difference in their lives. This study confirms that belief and establishes that we are making a significant and measurable difference.” said Judge Fred Bonner.”
Further examples

ACA Don Madsen was also pleased with the study’s findings. “This study demonstrates that by providing access to services and providing meaningful alternatives to incarceration, we can help individuals change their lives for the better.” he said.

Seattle City Attorney Tom Carr was equally impressed. “We already knew that the Court was expediting case resolutions, saving jail costs, making communities whole through community service, and helping defendants get needed services. This latest finding establishes that the program is also reducing defendant recidivism in significant ways.” he said.
Further Resources & Materials

USDOJ, Bureau of Justice Assistance website on Evaluation
https://www.bja.gov/evaluation/types-research.htm

Justice Management Institute Outcome Evaluation of Seattle Community Court
http://www.jmijustice.org/resources/specialty_courts/outcome-evaluation-of-the-seattle-municipal-court

Justice Management Institute Implementation Study of Outcome Evaluation of Seattle Community Court
http://www.jmijustice.org/resources/specialty_courts/the-seattle-community-court-start-up-and-implementation

NCSC Impact Study of Red Hook Community Court
http://www.ncsc.org/~/media/Files/PDF/Services%20and%20Experts/Areas%20of%20expertise/Problem%20solving%20courts/11012013-Red-Hook-Final-Report.ashx

NCSC Implementation Study of Philadelphia Community Court
http://cdm16501.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/spcts/id/199
National Center for State Courts Evaluation of the Red Hook Community Justice Center

Audience Poll #5

As a result of this session, my understanding of Outputs & Outcomes: Measuring & Evaluating a Problem Solving Court Initiative, is

a) Greatly improved
b) Somewhat improved
c) About the same
d) Somewhat diminished
e) Greatly diminished and I am more confused than ever
NOTICE OF FEDERAL FUNDING & FEDERAL DISCLAIMER

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