

Using Data-driven, Evidence-based Approaches to Solving Crime Problems



ISSUE BRIEF: BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR STATE ADMINISTERING AGENCIES

Introduction

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation (BCJI) program is a Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative (NRI) that helps to support the development of distressed local and tribal communities.¹ As a place-based, community driven, crime prevention initiative, BCJI brings together community organizations and residents, local government (including law enforcement), local business, and researchers/academics in order to address crime problems within micro-places within a jurisdiction.

Issue

The BCJI program is a relatively new initiative-FY 2015 will represent the 4th cohort of sites. The composition of the collaborative is driven by the specific needs and skills of each individual site, and therefore each site is unique. Although the goal of the program is to address crime and neighborhood revitalization, each site

has its own skills to bear on the problems and each problem requires individual tailoring to properly address them. In a way this is a potential weakness, but it is also the greatest strength of the program.

To date the BCJI model has been implemented in over 60 jurisdictions across the country.² While sites vary significantly in their demographic composition, they all share similar a goal - plan initiatives that leverage data and lead to innovative approaches to crime prevention and violence reduction.

The ability to extrapolate the impact of these programs to other areas is limited. However, evidence-based research can, at least, offer a structure for planning an intervention. For instance, utilizing the SARA model within the context of Problem-Oriented Policing provides a structure for identifying problems and factors contributing to those problems ((S)canning and (A)nalysis), and generating solutions (R)esponse). An often forgotten element to that process is (A)ssessment, in which the outcomes of those efforts are evaluated.³ Based on this

The BCJI program has four core objectives:

1. **Place Based Strategy:** To better integrate crime control efforts with revitalization strategies;
2. **Data Driven:** To improve the use of data and research to problem solve and guide program strategy;
3. **Community Oriented:** To increase community and resident engagement in shaping crime prevention and revitalization efforts; and
4. **Partnerships and Capacity Building:** To promote sustainable collaboration with cross-sector partners to tackle problems from multiple angles.

<https://www.bja.gov/funding/BCJI16.pdf>

assessment, efforts can be retooled if they are not generating beneficial outcomes.

Some BCJI sites have developed programs to enhance existing partnerships whereas others start fresh with individuals and agencies who have not worked together previously. Initially, there can be many voices addressing different needs which need to be focused through deliberation to inform the selection of strategies to reduce crime and revitalize the area. Some sites have a team that has worked together previously, helped by an experienced researcher who can help guide the discussion of interventions and provide the most appropriate methods for evaluating those efforts.

While the infusion of BCJI grants provide the funding and resources for these collaborations and initiatives to get started, long term sustainability is dependent on funding from state and local governments.

Practice Pointers

While results vary, many BCJI sites have produced positive and promising outcomes. Initiatives have contributed to long lasting collaborative community partnerships and evidence based programs that have significantly contributed to a reduction in crime and improved community relations.

In the Morang Avenue corridor of Detroit, MI, law enforcement, community groups, prosecutors, and various other community stake holders partnered together to develop “targeted enforcement activities and provisions of wraparound services for at-risk youth.”⁴ This initiative contributed to a 20% reduction in part 1 offenses.⁵

In Milwaukee, WI, part 1 crimes around hot spots declined by approximately 25% and by approximately 12% in BCJI target areas from 2013-2014.⁶ This decrease was due in large part to a collaborative effort to revitalize abandoned

homes and increase homeownership in the community. Research has shown that home ownership increases the likelihood of community investment and social cohesion.⁷

The BCJI program has also been instrumental in fostering social cohesion and mutual trust between citizens and law enforcement. In Seattle, community leaders received intensive problem-solving training that enabled them to lead crime reduction efforts in identified crime hot spots.⁸ In the city of Philadelphia, community members were trained as community ambassadors in order to assist with community beautification and crime prevention efforts.⁹ Survey results show that these initiatives have contributed to improved perceptions of law enforcement.

Priority Needs

BCJI programs offer the opportunity to identify important needs specific to the program, but can be beneficial to the criminal justice field as a whole.

Data analysis:

First, the ability to evaluate crime prevention/reduction efforts hinges on quality data, but also hinges on the presence of individuals with the expertise to digest what those data mean (i.e. crime analysts). Crime analysis has the potential to enhance day-to-day operations in addition to providing insight into short and long term trends, priority areas, etc. A properly trained crime (data) analyst, especially one with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) training, can effectively assist with identifying (high crime) hot spots in order to better focus law enforcement (and community) activities.

Evidence-Based Policy/Practice:

The various departments within the executive branch (e.g. Education, Justice, etc.) have provided the public with clearinghouses of evidence-based programs. However, all evidence is not created equal nor deserves equal weight.

Practitioners (police and other criminal justice system members, community groups, and even individuals within a community) often do not have a research background that would assist in making informed decisions about what constitutes good, rigorous research and what research evidence would support potential programs a given area is considering when generating their crime prevention plans. Practitioners who partner with researchers and/or academics are in a better position to both generate a strong evidence-based approach to local crime problems and be able to properly assess the impact of their efforts within a scientific framework.

Broad-based collaborations:

Within the context of policing, the Police Foundation has often heard “we cannot arrest our way out of crime.” Local law enforcement is not equipped to be the sole handler of crime problems within a community. With this in mind, greater crime control gains can be had with multiple partners engaging with the community in order to jointly address the specific issues which drive crime within a given area. Although the police can be central to these efforts, a program that addresses crime problems from a broad spectrum engaging with multiple partners with the purpose of taking ownership of an area will achieve more lasting effects than “simple” short term, single agency efforts. The BCJI program offers a model that provides that kind of structure. BCJI sites utilize cross-sector partnerships to develop strategies that leverage multiple resources to address physical disorder, social and economic opportunities, and assist communities to develop collective efficacy. At the same time, the BCJI program offers an opportunity for criminal justice agencies to work with community partners, which provides the potential for enhanced legitimacy in the eyes of the public. BCJI sites focus on evidence-based practice, and through collaborative efforts with their cross-sector partnerships, sites develop their own strategic

plans to address crime and other social issues within chronic hot spots of crime.

Recommendations

The BCJI program provides much needed support to criminal justice agencies. However, these funds will produce the biggest impact (and return on investment) when they are allocated based on a demonstration of need that is backed by research. In addition, the impact of these funds will be more readily apparent within the context of a formal evaluation or, in its absence, consultation with criminal justice researchers with expertise in identifying appropriate programs addressing particular crime issues and the best ways in which to determine the impact of those efforts.

Support and funding from SAAs can help to ensure the long term sustainability of BCJI initiatives. SAAs can also provide funding to facilitate the development of crime prevention and community revitalization initiatives utilizing core BCJI principles.

There are three main areas that SAAs can focus on:

Focused approaches:

Crime prevention efforts will produce the biggest impact if they are focused on a narrow set of problems, places, or individuals contributing to the amount and type of crime in a given area. This applies to strategies and tactics as well as specific technologies brought to bear. Interventions based on prior research can be tweaked in novel and innovative ways based on the creativity of the people/organizations involved as well as the particular characteristics of their use. Innovative use of prior technologies or utilizing new technologies and programs in different ways should also be encouraged.

Data driven:

A key component to identifying the best crime prevention efforts, tactics/strategies to utilize,

and individuals and groups to employ to address specific crime problems is solid data analysis. Typically, within context of policing (but also prosecution and probation/parole) a good crime analyst can provide the information needed (in addition to providing context to the available information) in order to generate informed decisions about where to focus crime prevention efforts and what resources are available. The crime analyst also can serve as the liaison between the criminal justice agency, community and other government groups, and researchers.

Research assisted:

The best use of funds will occur within agencies who utilize a research partner. Within the BCJI and Smart Suite of programs offered by BJA, a formal partnership with researchers is required. However, other BJA funding programs can

benefit from solid scientific impact and process evaluations. Formal research evaluations can be expensive; however, this is not necessarily a given. Although the impact of Byrne JAG funds will be best addressed through formal evaluation, an individual agency can demonstrate its effectiveness with the guidance of a research partner. Either way, the input of an independent party with no stake in the outcome, who has a background in sound research methods, is essential to demonstrating the effectiveness of a criminal justice intervention; providing feedback for altering an intervention if mid-course corrections are needed; and finally providing feedback to the criminal justice field. The generation and sharing of this knowledge will only serve to enhance future criminal justice interventions in other jurisdictions.

The Police Foundation's mission is to advance policing through innovation and science. It is the oldest nationally-known, non-profit, non-partisan, and non-membership-driven organization dedicated to improving America's most noble profession – policing. The Police Foundation has been on the cutting edge of police innovation for 45 years since it was established by the Ford Foundation as a result of the President's Commission on the Challenge of Crime in a Free Society. Through ground-breaking research, training and technical assistance (TTA), and collaborative reform efforts, the Police Foundation has demonstrated success in improving policing policies, strategies, and tactics.

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¹ Bureau of Justice Assistance. *Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation (BCJI) Program*. Retrieved from:

https://www.bja.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?Program_ID=70#horizontalTab4

² Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). (2015). *Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Program*. Retrieved from:

http://programs.lisc.org/CSI/Images/BCJI_Fact_Sheet_2015.pdf

³ Center for Problem-Oriented Policing. *The SARA Model*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.popcenter.org/about/?p=sara>

⁴ Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). *Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation (BCJI) Program BCJI Site*

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⁵ Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). (2015). *Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Program*. Retrieved from:

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⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Uchida, D., C., Swatt, L., M., Solomon, E., S., Varano, S. (2014). Neighborhoods and Crime: Collective Efficacy and Social Cohesion in Miami Dade County. *Justice & Security Strategies, Inc.* Retrieved from: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/245406.pdf>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

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