Program Evaluation Briefing Series

#5

Incorporating Evaluation Into the Request for Proposal (RFP) Process

Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center

Justice Research and Statistics Association

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

The JJEC, which is supported by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, provides evaluation information, training, and technical assistance to enhance juvenile justice evaluation in the states. For more information about the JJEC project, visit our Web site at http://www.jrsa.org/jjec or e-mail us at jjec@jrsa.org.

Incorporating Evaluation Into the Request for Proposal (RFP) Process

This is one of a series of briefings prepared by the Justice Research and Statistics Association under the Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center (JJEC) project. The purpose of this briefing series is to provide juvenile justice program managers with information that will help them evaluate their programs. Each briefing addresses a topic that is of particular interest to juvenile justice program managers who are trying to determine the effectiveness of the programs they operate.

Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center
Justice Research and Statistics Association
777 North Capitol Street, N.E.
Suite 801
Washington, D.C. 20002
(202) 842-9330
http://www.jrsa.org/jjec

Acknowledgments

This briefing was prepared by Elizabeth Martin, M.P.A., Program Manager at the Institute for Public Sector Innovation, Muskie School for Public Service, University of Southern Maine; Deborah Kaufman-Levy, Research Analyst with JRSA's Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center Project; Stan Orchowsky, JRSA's Research Director; and Mary Poulin, Project Manager with JRSA's Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center Project. Nancy Michel, JRSA's Director of Publications, provided editing. Eric Peterson, the project's Grant Manager at the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, provided valuable support for which we are extremely grateful. Many examples provided in this publication are based on the experiences of the Maine Statistical Analysis Center and the Maine Juvenile Justice Advisory Group. We greatly appreciate their input and expertise.

September 2002

This project was supported by Grant No. 98-RN-FX-0112 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Advantages of Early Evaluation Planning 2

Evaluation Plan Elements 3

Fine-Tuning Your RFP 5

Educating Potential Grantees About the New RFP Process 8

Evaluation Reporting Requirements 9

Conclusion 10

Resources 11

Agencies that fund juvenile justice programs can encourage early evaluation planning by including an evaluation component in the application process.

Introduction

Evaluation is a key component of program development and management. It can be a useful tool for juvenile justice program managers to use in identifying desired program outcomes and in determining how the activities of their staff members will achieve these outcomes. Whether a program serves 20, 200, or 2,000 juveniles a year, it should engage in some form of evaluation activity. Agencies that fund juvenile justice programs can encourage early evaluation planning by including an evaluation component in the application process.

This briefing provides an overview of how juvenile justice funding agencies can incorporate evaluation requirements into their Requests for Proposals (RFPs). The experiences of the Maine Statistical Analysis Center (SAC), which worked with its state Juvenile Justice Advisory Group (JJAG) to develop an RFP protocol that incorporates evaluation, are used as a framework for understanding and describing the process.

An RFP that lays out the expected evaluation elements requires grantees to think about the results they are trying to achieve and how their program activities contribute to those results.

Advantages of Early Evaluation Planning

Incorporating evaluation into an RFP has many benefits for both the grantor and potential grantees. As a program funder, you want program managers to think about evaluation as an integral part of the program planning and design process. They need to understand that evaluation is not only important to you, but it is mandatory if they want funding. An RFP that clearly lays out the evaluation elements expected of grantees requires them to think from the beginning about the results they are trying to achieve and how their daily program activities contribute to those results. Requiring grantees to document this information for a wider audience also makes them think more precisely not only about what they are doing, but also about how to demonstrate that their program benefits the juveniles it is supposed to serve.

In 1999, Maine inserted a requirement in its RFP for JJAG funding that applicants submit a project narrative describing desired accomplishments of the program, when and how the goals will be achieved, and how the program will be able to report if it was successful. This modification resulted in applications that were better organized, demonstrated improved program planning, and had clearer program goals, objectives, and activities. In effect, this evaluation component forced applicants to think more carefully about their programs and what to do to accomplish their goals and objectives.

Incorporating evaluation into the RFP process means requiring potential grantees to submit an evaluation plan as part of their proposal.

Evaluation Plan Elements

In most cases, incorporating evaluation into the RFP process means requiring potential grantees to submit an evaluation plan as part of their proposal. What information should be included in this evaluation plan? As discussed in the first JJEC Program Evaluation Briefing, *Juvenile Justice Program Evaluation: An Overview*, we propose a seven-step process that juvenile justice program managers can use to analyze and assess the functioning of their programs.

1. Define the problem. As the grantor, you must first require that the grantees clearly identify the nature and scope of the problem their programs are designed to address. The program must provide data that document how widespread the problem is, whether it is getting worse, and whether it affects certain groups of juveniles more than others.

2. Implement research-based programming. The program being considered for funding represents the grantee's proposed solution to the problem identified in Step 1. Your RFP needs to indicate that you will fund only those initiatives that either: (a) have been demonstrated to be effective in solving this problem in other locations; or (b) are promising approaches to solving the problem, in the sense that they are supported by theory or previous research. The RFP should contain information about these effective approaches or should provide a list of resources that can be used by grantees to find this information.

3. Create a program logic model. Grant applicants must be able to explain what they will be doing and how their program will address the problem they are attempting to solve. They should be able to identify the program's goals, objectives, and activities, and be able to state how each activity supports a particular objective, and how each objective contributes to achieving the program's goal(s). The result of this process is often referred to as a "logic model." The RFP should describe how to develop logic models and should, if possible, provide a preferred format. This will help both the program and funder understand, for example, why the program will provide a particular activity.

4. Develop measures. After the relationships between the program's goals, objectives, and activities are defined, program managers should develop a set of measures or indicators that can be used to assess how well the goals and objectives have been met. Requiring potential grantees to document performance measures as part of the grant application process encourages them to think very specifically about how they will demonstrate that what they are doing is having a positive impact on the juveniles they are serving.

5. Collect and analyze data. Once program measures are in place, grantees must collect data that will show whether the program's objectives have been met. The RFP should require grantees to explain how they will implement the measures they identified (for example, administering surveys to juveniles or requiring counselors to complete rating scales). Once the data are collected, they will need to be analyzed and reported. By requiring grantees as part of the application process to demonstrate how they will do this, you help ensure that they will have the necessary knowledge and resources to actually implement their proposed evaluation plan.

6. Report findings. The RFP should require grant applicants to state that once the data they collect about their program's performance have been analyzed, they will report the results. These reports do not have to be complex or extensive. For example, grantees could list their goals, objectives, and activities, then present their data showing whether they met their objectives at the end of the grant period. It is important that grantees understand that they will be required to summarize what they have learned about the effectiveness of their program.

7. Reassess program logic. If grantees follow the steps outlined above, they will accumulate a sizeable amount of information about their program's characteristics and operations. These evaluation findings will become a useful tool for programs to fine-tune activities, add or change specific objectives, and identify more accurate measures of program performance. The RFP should encourage program managers to report on how they have used evaluation information to improve their program's functioning. This report can, in fact, be part of the program's funding proposal for the following year.

Working with key stakeholders from the inception of your RFP planning can help you streamline the process and ensure their cooperation later.

Fine-Tuning Your RFP

The process of creating an RFP that effectively incorporates an evaluation component takes time and planning, but it is well worth the effort. The thoughts and suggestions that follow are based on the experiences of the Maine SAC and State Advisory Group (SAG). They should be of help to funding agencies that wish to include an evaluation component in their RFPs.

- Obtain feedback from key stakeholders.

Working with key stakeholders from the inception of your RFP planning can help you streamline the process and ensure their cooperation later when program results are being evaluated. Such stakeholders might include representatives from all of the agencies funding the programs; potential users of the evaluation information, such as legislative staff; SAG representatives; representatives of local programs; and local decisionmakers, such as city council or county commission members. Stakeholders should discuss what information they need from potential grantees and how grantees will provide it. They can also help ensure that the information generated by programs will be useful for decisionmaking and that potential grantees have the resources to deliver the type of information being requested in the RFP. Finally, stakeholders can relieve programs with multiple funding streams from the burden of providing the same information in different ways to various funding agencies by agreeing on a common reporting format.

Maine worked with a four-member advisory committee composed of JJAG members, who were former and potential grantees and grant reviewers, to get input about adapting a program planning and evaluation model similar to the one discussed above. All JJAG members reviewed the revised model that resulted, and their comments and suggestions were incorporated to produce the final model.

- Adapt successful procedures and models for your own needs.

As a program funder, you are responsible for identifying an evaluation model to be used by grantees. Look at the models and procedures other agencies are using to see if they produce the type of information you want your programs to report. Established models can be adapted to more closely fit your needs, or elements can be taken from a variety of different models and used to create a model tailored to your agency. If your agency decides not to require a specific evaluation model, however, you should provide potential grantees with information on a range of models and formats to help them develop their own evaluation plans.

At the beginning of its planning process, Maine chose the United Way Outcome Measurement Program Outcome Model as a basis for its program planning requirements. This outcome model, often referred to as a logic model, is a visual description of the relationship between objectives, activities, and stated outcomes. It requires programs to quantify what they propose to do in terms of program implementation and achievements. Maine did a number of things to make the model easier to complete:

- rewrote each component as a series of questions which applicants then had to answer (see page 7 for a presentation of the JJEC logic model as a series of questions)
- provided examples of each component
- included a glossary of key evaluation terms and concepts to reduce confusion about what terms mean and to ensure the use of consistent terminology
- included a list of resources to consult to learn more about outcome measurement.

JJEC Logic Model in Question Form

Goal: What does the program hope to achieve in the long run?

Objectives	Activities	Process Measures	Outcomes	Outcome Measures
What difference will the program make, for whom, and by when?	What will the program be doing?	What information will the program use to document what it is doing?	What and how much of a difference did the program make, for whom, and by when?	What information will the program use to document the resulting differences/changes?

A direct link exists between objectives and outcomes.

A crucial part of what should be considered in the course of completing a logic model is the program's ability to actually do what it proposes. The program should have appropriate resources, both monetary and personnel, to conduct its activities, and a suitable data collection process and evaluation design should be carefully planned.

- Seek input from relevant state agencies.

Agencies in your state that work in areas related to yours may be able to make valuable suggestions about your RFP and its evaluation component, so it is worth the time and effort to ask them for input. They may notice important issues that you have overlooked or have ideas that you have not considered. Additionally, related agencies might be able to help with the evaluation and may benefit from the results as well. Relevant state agencies may include Health and Human Services, Juvenile Services, or Family Services.

Help your applicants become familiar with your application process in general and your evaluation requirements in particular.

Educating Potential Grantees About the New RFP Process

Once the evaluation component has been included in the juvenile justice RFP, the actual process for notifying potential grantees of this change is not difficult. The following suggestions may help make the transition even smoother.

- Help your applicants become familiar with your application process in general and your evaluation requirements in particular by holding informational meetings and training sessions, providing technical assistance, and distributing printed materials. Most states hold pre-bidders conferences or meetings which offer a good opportunity to review the evaluation information expected of potential grantees. Many grantees will not be terribly sophisticated about evaluation, and they will benefit from technical assistance both prior to their submitting proposals and again after they receive awards.

  Maine provided feedback to struggling applicants via e-mail, telephone, and in one-on-one meetings. Be cautious about providing technical assistance during an open RFP, however. Maine's rules prevent giving unequal assistance to potential grantees during a proposal preparation period. Maine sent out a mailing to the entire list of potential grantees that included conference materials, a Grant Application Guide, and characteristics of successful proposals.

- Encourage fair and timely communication between your agency and potential grantees. For example, introductory letters sent a month in advance to announce an upcoming RFP and your evaluation expectations effectively lengthen the response and planning time for applicants and create a crucial period during which you can address preliminary questions and concerns. This is especially important if evaluation is a new component of the grant application process.

- Clearly specify your evaluation requirements in the RFP and reinforce them in your RFP announcement. Some states go so far as to require their grantees to select from a set of objectives those that are relevant to their programs. If your state's evaluation strategy includes components that will affect grantees, make applicants aware of these (for example, grantees may be expected to participate in a multisite evaluation study).

Grantees should submit periodic reports on their progress in meeting the specific goals, objectives, activities, and measures required in the RFP.

Evaluation Reporting Requirements

Once a project has been funded, you as the funding agency will want to know that the grantee is actually carrying out the evaluation plan as stated in the proposal. Most states require grantees to report specific information on a regular basis. For example, grantees may be required to describe the progress they have made in fulfilling their stated goals and objectives on a quarterly basis.

The reporting requirement is a logical extension of incorporating evaluation into the RFP. Grantees should submit periodic reports on their progress in meeting the specific goals, objectives, activities, and measures required in the RFP and included in their proposal. At the end of the award period they should be required to submit a summary or cumulative report that documents the degree to which the program has implemented the activities and met the goals and objectives stated in the proposal. Process measures should clearly indicate that the program is being implemented as designed. They should answer questions like, is the target population actually the population being served? Are all of the activities being carried out as designed? Outcome measures should be appropriate and valid indicators of whether objectives are being reached. For example, if decreasing drug use is an objective, self-reported drug use at the end of the program is a better measure than any arrests occurring during the program. All of these reporting requirements should be clearly set forth in the RFP so that grantees are aware that they are responsible for keeping the funding agency informed about their program's performance.

By requiring, as part of the RFP process, that potential grantees develop thoughtful evaluation plans, you can help ensure that programs understand and document why they are doing what they do.

Conclusion

Evaluation is an integral part of planning and running any program, yet too often it is overlooked or, even worse, considered an unnecessary burden. Funding agencies are in a unique position to encourage the use of evaluation information as a tool to improve local program management. By requiring, as part of the RFP process, that potential grantees develop thoughtful evaluation plans, you can help ensure that programs understand and document why they are doing what they do and how what they do will make a difference in the lives of the juveniles they serve. In the process you will learn which programs are most effective and deserving of future funding. Program managers will learn to refine their thinking about what they are trying to accomplish and how they are going about it. They will learn what information they need to collect on an ongoing basis to assess their progress toward achieving their desired outcomes. They can then use what they have learned to further refine the goals, objectives, and activities of their program.

Resources

The publications and Web sites listed below provide additional information on the concepts and procedures discussed in this briefing.

- Examples of state RFPs that incorporate evaluation components are available on the JJEC Web site at *http://www.jrsa.org/jjec/state_info/examples-rfp.html*. Maine's RFP is included as an example.

- A copy of the JJEC evaluation briefing *Juvenile Justice Program Evaluation: An Overview* can be obtained from the JJEC Web site at: *http://www.jrsa.org/jjec/about/jjec-pubs.html*.

- Additional information on the United Way Outcome Measurement Program Outcome Model can be found on the United Way Web site at *http://national.unitedway.org/outcomes*.