What’s Going On at NJJEC?

In conjunction with OJJDP, NJJEC held a webinar entitled Data Collection and Analysis on March 22 for 413 attendees. This webinar was the fourth and final webinar in the series Assessing Project Performance: Building Blocks of Evaluation and Performance Measurement. Topics included techniques for collecting accurate, high quality data, best practices for recording and storing data, techniques for using data and sharing results, and the use of data collection and analysis for program development and sustainability. Slides, audio, and other materials from the four-part webinar series are available on the NJJEC website. Thank you to everyone who participated! If you have ideas for future webinar topics, please e-mail njjec@jrsa.org.

On May 2, an NJJEC staff member participated in a webinar for tribal grantees entitled You Can’t Do Something With Nothing: Getting Your Data and Using It, hosted by OJJDP and Education Development Center’s Tribal Youth Program. The webinar focused on the basics of performance measurement and evaluation, and included an extensive discussion of data collection, storage, and reporting techniques. Audio and slides are available on the Tribal Youth Program website.

Upcoming Events of Interest

Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ) Annual Conference June 2012
The Coalition for Juvenile Justice will hold its annual conference in Washington, DC June 21 to 24. The theme of the conference is “Improving Justice Outcomes for Youth and Families: Uniting Science, Policy, and Practice.” Check the CJJ website for the agenda and to register.

Office of Justice Programs Financial Management Seminar June 2012
The Department of Justice’s Office of Justice Programs will host a series of seminars on the financial management of discretionary and formula grants. The live seminars will be held in Washington, DC June 20 to 21. While registration is already at capacity, OJP offers a free training online for direct award recipients with a current grant or cooperative agreement.
Featured Resources: Does “What Works” Work for You?

There are a number of databases that provide information about “what works” to criminal justice practitioners, based on rigorous evaluation that has found programs to be effective. Examples of these resources include CrimeSolutions.gov, the Model Programs Guide, and Blueprints for Violence Prevention. Each database reviews and rates the evidence for specific programs, and provides a profile for each program that includes the type of service or intervention involved, information about the data collected and research that has been conducted, a description of the target population, and the implementation process.

These resources are valuable for juvenile justice practitioners, but do not necessarily provide program options that address every situation. It may be necessary to make changes to an existing program so that the program can be effective in a specific context.

Consider the nature of the problem you are trying to address, as well as the characteristics of your target population and the location in which you are operating the program. For example, an anti-bullying program might need to be altered to account for racial or cultural tensions. An alcohol abuse prevention program demonstrated effective for middle school youth might have no impact on high school seniors without accounting for age differences. An anti-drug program that has been successful in urban areas may need to be changed in order to be effectively implemented in a rural area.

This has become a source of confusion for many in the juvenile justice community, because we know fidelity in implementation, or following the program plan, is an important part of evidence-based practice.

How can each and every jurisdiction use research evidence to support its efforts in juvenile justice? How are we able to make informed decisions about program innovation? What elements are essential for program effectiveness, and what components can be changed to meet local needs?

One possible solution to this problem is to consider the use of evidence-based practices or components. Such evidence-based strategies often cross model or promising programs—that is, a similar approach has been found to be effective in different programs and for varying target populations. This approach might be likened to deciding to eat healthfully rather than following a strict diet—eating well is important for everyone, but certain diets might not be effective depending on personal characteristics such as age. Towards this end, we need to consider the elements that are critical to effectiveness in different contexts.

Safety, Fairness, Stability: Repositioning Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare to Engage Families and Communities, a paper by Dr. Joan Pennell, Carol Shapiro, and Dr. Carol Spigner published by the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, provides an example of this approach: engaging the components of a system in using the “traits of effective practice” (p. vi). The paper discusses the use of family engagement across child welfare and juvenile justice agencies.

Family engagement is defined as directly involving families in social services affecting children. Principles of family engagement are found in model programs such as Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT), which include family members in the delivery of therapy for violent, disruptive, or substance-abusing youth. Family engagement is the basic strategy used by evidence-based programs like MST and FFT to address problem behaviors in youth.
The paper notes an important consideration in using evidence-based components or strategies: *how* do these strategies work? In the case of family engagement, the authors explain that family participation can help hold youth accountable, press family members into being involved in the youth’s behavioral improvement, and reinforce the youth’s support system.

Understanding the “how” rather than just knowing the “what” helps us to consider ways this strategy might be applied in a specific context. For example, a juvenile justice programmer in a rural area is still able to use family engagement without necessarily employing a psychologist. The frequency and type of interaction between the youth and his/her family is the critical component. Awareness of program characteristics and the mechanisms by which they effect change can assist juvenile justice practitioners in the creation of new strategies or modification of existing interventions. This ensures that these new strategies employ findings from research evidence, even if the program does not adhere to a specific model program plan.

**Evaluation Feature:**
**How Can I Measure Something That Doesn’t Occur?**
**Collecting Outcome Data for Prevention Programs**

Many juvenile programs focus on preventing negative behaviors by youth. For example, programs try to prevent youth from bullying other youth, using drugs and alcohol, or becoming a victim of an Internet predator. Developing good performance measures to assess outcomes for these programs can be difficult because we are trying to measure something that, if the intervention is successful, will not occur. However, if we understand program logic—the “how” and “why” of the program’s expected effect on the problem—we can use this information to assess behavior prevention.

One way to assess prevention is to administer pre- and post-tests to youth who participate in a program to determine if their attitudes and/or actions have changed over time. Collect information on the outcome of interest at the beginning of the program (this is called *baseline data*) and again once the program has been completed. While an evaluation is needed to link program activities to any observed changes in attitudes or actions, simply comparing this information before and after the program is a good way to see if expected changes have occurred. For prevention programs, this expected change typically involves improvement in attitudes or reduction in negative behaviors.

SAMHSA’s [National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27399541) provides information about substance abuse and mental health interventions that have been demonstrated effective. One program reviewed by NREPP is the SANKOFA Youth Violence Prevention Program, a product of The Center for Healthy Schools, Families, and Communities. The goal of the program is to prevent violence and victimization among 13- to 19-year-old African American youth.

The program, measures three different types of outcome data: fighting and bullying behaviors, violence-related bystander behaviors, and personal victimization. These data provide information on the youth’s behavior towards other youth, victimization of youth, and the youth’s responses to viewing violence (e.g. watching a fight as a bystander rather than walking away). Because this information is collected for program youth *before* and *after* they have participated in the program, it can be used to examine changes over time.
It is important for juvenile justice practitioners to review research evidence or databases of evidence-based programs such as NREPP to understand what types of data are typically collected to assess the effectiveness of intervention and prevention programs. These resources provide information and ideas on ways to measure program activities and outcomes, and possible sources from which these data might be collected.

**State Spotlight: Georgia**

The ability to report quality data across agencies serving youth is vital to planning and assessing juvenile justice initiatives. Data can be used to describe the nature and extent of problems, demonstrate progress, and provide information valuable for forming strategies that address at-risk or justice-involved youth. Accurate data are useful to state residents, educators, funding agencies, community programs and services, and the juvenile justice system. However, collecting this information and reporting it in an accessible and systematic way can be difficult.

Georgia has met this challenge by creating the [Georgia Juvenile Justice Data Clearinghouse](http://www.jrsa.org/njjec/). The goal of the project is to provide current and accurate juvenile justice data. Visitors to the project website are able to obtain information about juvenile offending and legal responses such as referrals, diversions, and commitments. The data are available statewide, and can be viewed by county or jurisdiction. The site includes a valuable but often-neglected element in data reporting: definitions of the terms and sources. This information promotes *uniformity* in data reporting—ensuring that each county and agency reports the same type of information derived from the same sources.

The website is maintained by [The Georgia Governor’s Office for Children and Families](http://www.jrsa.org/njjec/) (GOCF). The project is a result of the cooperative efforts of Georgia’s Council of Juvenile Court Judges, Department of Juvenile Justice, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, and the Georgia Public Defender Standards Council.