

Evaluation Partnership Project (EPP)
Juvenile Justice Advisory Group, Maine Department of Corrections
Maine Statistical Analysis Center

September 1, 2000 through March 31, 2001

Final Report

Overview

“This project has provided a variety benefits -- some planned, some unanticipated. In the first category is a better-informed state advisory group. Through training and general discussion of the project, they have become more aware of their role and responsibility in the subgrant award process, from setting goals for a program area, to issuing a request for proposals that solicits the type of proposal they want to fund, through review and setting conditions for contracts. Applicants’ plans for evaluation, while seldom discussed during review before, have now become an important part of the review. The review process takes less time and results in clear written justification for the decisions made.”

Deborah Rafnell, Juvenile Justice Specialist
Maine Department of Corrections

This report describes activities and outcomes for the EPP II project since our Progress Report dated February 16, 2001. The activities included in Attachment A of our subgrant award are complete, with modifications described in a project revision. Essentially, we shifted resources from training costs to salaries, in order to provide additional technical assistance to grantees of the Juvenile Justice Advisory Group (JJAG).

The additional emphasis on technical assistance proved to be time well spent. In tracking the progress of the grantees with whom we worked we see clear improvements in their capacity to develop evaluation plans. JJAG members, grant reviewers, and grantees all speak positively about improvements to the decision-making process resulting from the yearlong effort under the two Evaluation Partnership Project Grants (EPP I and EPP II).

EPP II allowed us to build on the success of the first grant and continue to work with the JJAG and its grantees in building evaluation capacity through a coordinated training and technical assistance effort. Under this second grant, we accomplished the following:

- We presented 2 regional training conferences in October of 2000. The conferences stressed the importance of evaluation in the context of performance government, described methods of developing evaluation plans, and highlighted model programs in Maine.
- We published the proceedings for distribution to agencies that have had contact with the JJAG and are considered potential grantees. The proceedings provided a comprehensive collection of resources for

developing plans for juvenile justice programs in Maine. (We provided this information to JRSA attached to the interim report.)

- In February of 2001, JRSA approved a program and budget revision that allowed us to offer technical assistance to agencies that had not been successful in receiving funding from the JJAG. We offered each agency the opportunity to review their proposal with the EPP Project Coordinator and the Juvenile Justice Specialist, and to discuss areas where proposals (and particularly evaluation plans) might be strengthened.
- We developed several other interventions that are described in the following Summary of Activities, in addition to revising the grant application forms and instructions in response to our meetings with grantees. Our intent was to remain focused on improving the whole process rather than just “fixing” the deficiencies in the grantees’ plans.

A detailed summary of project activities is provided below

EPP II—Summary of Project Activities

September, 2000

- Preparations for regional training conferences: logistics, program/curriculum development, publicity and registration

October, 2000

- Training conferences in Orono and Brunswick; 40 attendees
- Participant Assessments summarized (attached)
- Proceedings compiled and mailed to JJAG agency list
- JJAG issues Request for Proposals, using new application forms, grant guide and reviewer scoring sheet (Developed under EPP I)

November, 2000

- 16 agency proposals reviewed; funding decisions by JJAG
- Informal feedback from grant reviewers about the process
- JJ Specialist & Project Coordinator analyze unsuccessful proposals to develop list of common problems, particularly with evaluation planning

December, 2000

- Progress report to JRSA with request for project and budget revision to emphasize technical assistance. Extension of grant period until March 31, 2001.
- JJ Specialist and Project Coordinator set times for technical assistance to 9 agencies whose proposals weren't funded (Review common problems and address specific agency concerns)

January, 2001

- Technical assistance visits to 9 agencies begin. The process includes a query as to how the application forms & instructions might be improved.

February, 2001

- Technical Assistance visits are completed.
- As a result of these meetings, revisions are made to the application forms and grant guide. The forms, instructions, and guide are merged; and the number of pages is reduced by one half (see attached final versions of the grant application and instructions)
- Reviewer scoring sheet revised to be consistent with application content and reduced to one page (see attached final document).

March, 2001

- Grant funding period ends. Final report delayed until results of spring RFPs.
- RFP out using revised application documents. New RFP requirement for collaboration among agencies.

April, 2001

- 20 proposals submitted in response to JJAG RFP. 6 were from agencies that had received TA under this project. While most of these showed improvements in their evaluation plans, only one received funding.
- The JJ Specialist provides additional feedback to agencies around areas of concern, through telephone calls and a mailing: "Most Frequent Reasons for Not Funding Proposals".
- RFP issued for May submission of proposals

May, 2001

- 30 grants submitted under 3 categories. Five proposals were from agencies receiving technical assistance. Of these, three were funded. Even though other agencies were not funded for unrelated reasons, we saw improvement in their evaluation plans.
- Survey of 7 grant reviewers to determine perceived change in decision-making process and quality of plans coming to the JJAG.

Outcomes

1. Improved Capacity of the JJAG and its Grantees

“Better applications are leading to better contracts, higher quality progress reports, and ultimately much more useful program information for subgrantees, for this office, and for periodic reports to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.”

“My own understanding of and ability to explain and develop performance measures has improved too, improving the quality of the technical assistance I am able to provide prospective applicants. ”

Deborah Rafnell, JJ Specialist

In the most recent round of applications (received in May of 2001) there is clear evidence of improvement in the quality of evaluation plans submitted by the agencies with which we worked. In three instances, this resulted in their receiving a grant from the JJAG. Agencies receiving TA that did not receive funding in this round rated higher in the review process than previously. Others were not funded for reasons unrelated to the quality of their evaluation plans. (See the chart below that follows the progress of agencies receiving technical assistance.)

Agencies Receiving Technical Assistance

In December 2000 – January 2001

AGENCY	Attended October 2000 Training	April 2001 RFP		May 2001 RFP	
		Submitted	Funded	Submitted	Funded
Alfond Youth Center		✓	No	✓	No
Day One					
Life Jackets	✓			✓	No
Lincoln County	✓	✓	No	✓	Yes
Opportunity Farm		✓	No		
PROP		✓	No	✓	No
Waldo County		✓	Yes		
York Hospital	✓	✓	No	✓	Yes

We provide comparative examples from evaluation plans of grantees with whom we worked: The following are examples of program outcome statements from plans submitted in November of 2000, and in May, 2001 (after receiving technical assistance under this project). Note that the outcomes described are more specific and measurable.

First Example:

Agency X, November, 2000 proposal

“At least fifty parents will participate in project sponsored Parenting Education classes and achieve increased knowledge about the developmental needs of youth and increased parenting and communication skills, as measured by participant pre and post tests.”

Agency X, May, 2001 Proposal

“The specific and measurable outcomes the project will achieve in order to build familial protective factors and decrease family risk factors in order to decrease juvenile delinquency are:

1. Parents are knowledgeable about child development.
2. Parents communicate clear and consistent family rules.

3. Parents and children use non-violent problem-solving skills.
4. Parents and children spend time in shared activities.
5. Parents are aware of risk and protective factors for early alcohol and drug use.
6. Parents and children experience positive supportive relationships.”

Second Example

Agency Y, November, 2000 Proposal

“The youth participating in Jump Start will answer back to the community through letters of apology, restitution, and/or community service”.

Agency Y, May, 2001 Proposal

“80% of the youth completing the Jump Start program will have no further involvement with the criminal justice system within one year after the completion of the program.”

2. Better Availability of Data/Higher Awareness of the Value of Data

“This focus on evaluation has JJAG members asking for more information both for planning purposes and prior to making funding decisions.”

Deborah Rafnell, JJ Specialist

According to the Juvenile Justice Specialist, there is more and better data available to the JJAG for purposes of grantee accountability (contracts and performance reports), for use in statewide planning, and for measuring the relative effectiveness of various intervention and prevention strategies used around the state. Grantees are showing a higher level of interest in sharing outcomes. Even prospective grantees are inquiring about the data available from the JJAG. The bank of data on the Developmental Assets Model has increased, as additional communities are using this model.

3. Clarity and Fairness in the Decision-making Process

“Clarifying JJAG expectations has resulted in clearer RFP’s, allowing applicants to respond more appropriately and successfully. Grant application instructions are more specific and more concise, and provide examples of performance measures specific to the justice system that help applicants understand the requirements.”

Deborah Rafnell, JJ Specialist

“I have found it helpful for the reviewers to get together after they have completed their individual scoring sheets, to compare notes. It’s been amazingly consistent lately. I believe it’s a very fair and impartial process, which is what it should be!”

A JJAG Grant Reviewer

Reviewers report that they are able to come to consensus more quickly than in the past, and that the process has a stronger sense of “fair play”. There are clearer criteria for awarding funds.

The Project Coordinator surveyed 7 individuals who had reviewed JJAG grant proposals during the past year. All seven surveys were returned. Of those respondents, all had reviewed proposals 2 or more times. Six of the seven had several years experience (or more) in reviewing grants.

SURVEY OF JJAG GRANT REVIEWERS

	Number of RFP rounds for which you reviewed proposals this year	Number of years experience as a grant reviewer	How helpful did you find the grant application format and scoring sheet?
RESPONDENT #1	3	8	Very Helpful
RESPONDENT #2	2	N/A	Very Helpful
RESPONDENT #3	2	6	Very Helpful
RESPONDENT #4	2	1	Very Helpful
RESPONDENT #5	3	8	Very Helpful
RESPONDENT #6	3	17	Moderately to Very Helpful
RESPONDENT #7	2	12-15	Very Helpful

One reviewer commented, *“Find it much improved and fairer than in the past and than it is many other granting agencies.”* Another stated, *“ Comparing how RFP’s were written and decided 4 or 5 years ago, the current process and mechanics are light years ahead...the results are top notch.”*

4. Higher Visibility for the JJAG and a Broader Pool of Applicants

“An unexpected benefit is a broader pool of applicants from a much more geographically widespread area than we had before. Equitable distribution is a requirement of the formula grant program. Compliance depends on identification of underserved or un-served areas. Applications from those mostly very rural areas are essential to bring their issues to the attention of the JJAG. Compilation of the mailing list for the training increased the size of our mailing of fund availability announcements, and advertising the training undoubtedly brought increased attention to both the advisory group’s goals and to the grant program.”

Deborah Rafnell, JJ Specialist

In addition to building the capacity of the JJAG and its grantees, the project has resulted in higher visibility for the JJAG, demonstrated by the increased number of applications for funding. Applications increased from 8 in May of 2000 to 30 in May of 2001. This may also indicate that a greater number of agencies feel confident about applying, or in some way feel the process is more accessible. The JJ Specialist states that she is more “out there” since the beginning of the project, and perceived as more accessible. More frequent and informal contacts have been a valuable TA tool.

Lessons Learned.

One of the lessons learned from this project is that it takes a longer time than anticipated to see results from training and TA. The success of agencies in improving their plans resulted from multiple interventions and included failures along the way. Several agencies, after attending training and TA, continued to make the same mistakes. In the end, virtually all showed some improvement even though they may not have yet written a successful proposal.

Secondly, because the project allowed a careful scrutiny of agencies’ proposals, other difficulties came to light. We learned, for example, that many grantees don’t understand the principles of inter-agency collaboration, and lack common definitions of terms such as “mentoring”. Another issue that surfaced was unrealistic expectations for recruitment of participants. These areas resulted in other interventions and/or will be addressed in future training and TA.

