Mark Myrent: My staff are getting really sick of hearing me talk about this all the time. It really is truly the framework that we need to pay attention to, to the question of are we assessing programs fairly? And are program activities logically linked to what it is they are trying to achieve?

Mark Myrent: You have seen diagrams of logic models. This is a generic version that they have on the OJJDP website. I don't want to dwell on that too much, you've all seen different versions of this.

Mark Myrent: I like this little graphic that I came across that explains it more English language, that the idea of logic model is using certain resources for certain program activities to produce certain outputs. Some customers can change their ways which lead to these outcomes, leading to these results.

Mark Myrent: And really the very best example of it, and this is also on the OJJDP website, is a diagram that was put together by some kids trying to structure a fundraising effort to ultimately help offer a safe place for kids to play. So, the resources were their community, the surrounding communities. The ideas; they sponsored a carnival, a yard sale, a car wash, a bake sale to raise $1500 as the result. Short term outcome; playground equipment for City Park. Goal; a safe place for kids to play. Simple and yet, right to the point. I love this picture.

Mark Myrent: I wanna kind of go through this quickly. Over [breaks up 00:32:51] This is going actually [breaks up 00:32:54]. A little more time than I thought. I should've realized this I [inaudible 00:32:57] to have a presentation that's gonna go about 20 minutes, and [breaks up 00:33:02] I'd like to hear the end of it. Only kidding.

Mark Myrent: The idea here is you can't expect program officials and community folks to have an understanding of a logic model. How do we decipher that information in a way that it's understandable? So, this is what went into our redesign of the Program Narrative Template.

Mark Myrent: So, here we have the kinds of grounded questions to get them to tell us what is the real problem that's being addressed. Which is really the initial foundation for the program. The kinds of things we ask them on the template that justifies the existence of the problem, qualitative sources, existing gaps in service related to the program that you would address, any other resources that could be directed to this problem, why it's sufficient. These are grounded questions [breaks up 00:34:14] in order to produce a good logic model.

Mark Myrent: In this next set of questions, we are asking about the inputs for the programs, specifically, the other sources of funding for this program besides what they're applying for. What have you needed to secure for this project? How did you
determine that current agency funding or other avenues couldn't support the proposed program.

Mark Myrent: More detail on the program need. And here we're focusing on a good area and the target population rather than the issue being addressed; asked to identify and describe the geographical region where the program will be implemented and the target population.

Mark Myrent: Beginning attempt to get a better understanding of the program activities and how they're linked to the underlying problem. Turn your attention to the first and the last bullet, they're really two sides of the same coin. Explain how the program will address the target population, or identified problem, and describing how the program activities are expected to produce the desired outcomes. So, we're getting them to document program activities with actual context; of why you are doing these program activities?

Mark Myrent: Focusing on program activities but slightly different context. Are they justifiable investment of public funds? When we look at these last three, what's over here, this one will [inaudible 00:36:04] allow them to [breaks up 00:36:08]. A lot of this program is in documented, evidence based program or promising program, but many people don't really know what that means, and I'm not sure I know what that means. There's a lot of different perspectives. It needs to be an evidence based program so, we tried to display that a little bit here, in the [inaudible 00:36:28] bullets to get them to tell us that they believe this is somehow a promising program. How it's appropriate to achieve your anticipated outcomes. How a program fits with your agencies work. How it best fits the needs of the community.

Mark Myrent: [breaks up 00:36:47] are bringing in some of these more traditional concepts. Now that we've given them the ground language, now we can ask them to try to articulate goals, objectives and performance indicators. And [Breaks up. 00:37:01] about in this, we not only give the definitions but, we provide them with a good example.

Mark Myrent: Some of the things that we asked for on the program proposal template, aren't necessarily tied directly to the logic model. Some of them have to do with other aspects of our ability to be able to track the performance of that program. It's well and good to use these responses to structure data reports, but we need to know something about their earning capacity. The start of that is us finding out what they value, decide what we value in terms of adherence to goal objectives. They're trying to put together data reports hoping that they find these things useful for their own internal management purposes as well. So questions are intended to have them explain to us what data they think are important for internal purposes. How the data will be used to provide management feedback and move the program.
Mark Myrent: Just wanting to get a sense of what their management capacity is. The capability of the organization, if they play well with others.

Mark Myrent: This is some information about startup activities that will assist us if we choose to do an implementation assessment of that program. We want them to describe what those startup activities had looked like.

Mark Myrent: Finally, the challenge is, speaks to implementation issues for the program but also to management capacity. If things start coming off the rails, what plans do they have to be able to do some course correction?

Mark Myrent: We are able to have staff do some review of that, on whether the goals, objectives and performance indicators seem right. The Grant Specialist works along side of us and they're the ones that facilitate all the contacts with the grantee. We do contact the grantee directly, and then we work together with grant staff to refine the goals, objectives and performance indicators and design data reports that can be used to measure their performance.

Mark Myrent: A common type of review that we do. We often are wanting to make objectives more specific, and [inaudible 00:40:01] They say, provide program monitoring and over-site for all subcontractors. This is a coordinating agency that's going to coordinate violence prevention service providers in a particular Chicago neighborhood. We're looking for more specificity. When we talk about objectives, we're talking about things that are measurable. Hundred percent of subcontractors will submit progress reports by a particular date, hundreds will receive site visits. Hundreds then will submit to service and administrative records review each quarter, those types of things.

Mark Myrent: To build [inaudible 00:40:48] reports. The goals and objectives. There's still some continuing negotiation that takes place making sure that it looks realistic to the program staff, giving the grants specialist an opportunity to weigh in on what they need, the things that are performance goals and objectives, and these reports are designed to collect standard information's from similar projects, so the communities corrections program in downstate Illinois is getting some similar standardized client characteristics as the one that's in Chicago. But it's also a balance for customizing it to make sure that unique program elements are captured that maybe different for that particular program.

Mark Myrent: Grant specialist; they may talk to the grantee to answer questions, define data elements, and whether it meets internal needs of the grantee where it’s not overly burdensome to complete for the grantee. And there's a process now of trying to determine how this is as easy as possible. Do they have an automated client system that may be able to facilitate reporting requirements that we have in place with them?

Mark Myrent: Well what we've done in some instances actually built a case level database. Now this slide you're looking at looks clean. And the reason for that, is its first
Mark Myrent: So, we're running short, I was going to show you an example of one that we've done. But in the interest of saving time I'll just kind of zip through this quickly. You can take a look at this when this goes up on the JRSA website, and we're interested in replicating this type of effort, we'd be happy to coach you through some of that.

Mark Myrent: I want to conclude by just talking, or going back to basics which is that there's a capacity of the different SAC's. Don't be discouraged if you're not able to do very [inaudible 00:44:44] and evaluational work. When we talk about this process we purposefully use the term program assessment [00:44:53] and evaluation. Let's turn our attention to this continuum at the bottom. There's an assessment which is an experimental design impact evaluation. And the truth of the matter is SACs do not have the capacity to do this type of work because of the technicalities and because of the amount of time and man power that's needed to do this work. But, there's a continuum of things that have great value to the JRSA that don't necessarily involve that level of rigor.

Mark Myrent: We spend a lot of time doing program profiles, and I'll show you a brief outline of that in a second, but there are various intermediate types of reports that are very useful to answering the questions to whether a program has been implemented well through good processor implementation evaluation, and one of the things that we're starting to look at right now, which does require more resources but I think is very central to the value for an FAA, is cost benefit analysis. The very least though a program file profile can be used as an indicator as to whether a program is being implemented in accordance with expectations. And these are the primary elements of it.

Mark Myrent: The statistical information from a well deigned report that's been put together for that grantee. And trying to at least answer this question; is the program generally meeting implementation and process objectives? Now in terms of making this decision about how rigorous of an assessment to carry out, how do you decide that? Is it something that you can even do in house? Is it better contracted out? And if you're going to do it in-house, what are those criteria for determining how much rigor should go into your effort to [breaks up 00:47:05]
the programs value. And these are some guidelines that we have. The potential magnitude of the program's criminal justice policies and practices. How core is this program? The status of the program area as a current merging area for innovation. Manageability of the evaluation. Is it a single or multiple site program? Require substantial travel and time? What’s the evaluability of this program? Does it have clear goals and objectives and available data? And, has it been a while since this program has been evaluated? Is there a lack of previous evaluation, now that it's been in operation for some time. Is there a potential for this program to be expanded or replicated in other jurisdictions? And of course, the amount of resources expended, why we personally have sunk a lot of resources into our multi-jurisdictional task forces, and consume a large portion of our JAG funds.

Mark Myrent: So I'm sorry if I rushed through this a little bit at the end. I wanted to get us on the mark a little bit. But, please feel free [inaudible 00:48:23] any of the slides at your leisure and contact me and my staff. I'm happy to give you any more information that you're interested in if you replicate any of these types of efforts.

Stan: Interesting and informative. I have a few questions here but before we get to those I just wanted to see if I could, if you say that [inaudible 00:48:56]. To put into some summary and sort of perspective. [inaudible 00:49:04] This is a matter of checking out what the FAA does? Or what decisions the FA makes and then trying to determine how it can help inform those decisions?

Mark Myrent: Yeah. And I think as to what is driving the information on these programs. That comes from the budget committee. Over site board. And going back to the example of the megs and task forces. They came to a realization three years ago that they had been funding them for close to 20 years and knew virtually nothing. [inaudible 00:49:55]On our investments to those programs, which is what prompted us to take on a more rigorous evaluation strategy program.

Mark Myrent: I think the message that I'm trying to convey is, the notion of process and implementation evaluation has been under-estimated. When I think about the role of the SAC it's different than academic researcher operating within a university and academic setting. We [inaudible 00:50:34] certain responsibilities to take ownership of accountability for the programs that we fund, and to us that means being able to furnish information to our grant staff to increase their monitoring capacity, and to be able to inform the decision makers on our over site board.

Stan: Okay. How is it that [inaudible 00:51:04] FAA's do resolve funding and funding decisions? Do you have examples of how you've been able to impact policies or practices that are different from funding or don't relate to funding decisions?

Mark Myrent: On programs that don't relate to- Yes. We do, is we're cognizant of grantees being a partner in the process. At times, the terminology is used differentiating
between a summative and a formative evaluation. We very much lean toward the formative evaluation. And all that means is the primary objective of our evaluation efforts are number toward offering a thumbs up, or a thumbs down on funding toward a program enhancement. And that's why it's very important when building these data reporting instruments to get the input from the program administrators themselves. We're interested in collecting data and enable them to identify programs strengths and weaknesses to be able to differentiate between those program clients they are successful with, and those they are not successful with. To be able to use that as a mechanism for mid-course correction. Not necessarily to terminate the program but to continuously build out the program and provides feedback mechanism to let them know what it is that they're doing well and not well.

Stan: Let's take a step back to a more general question. Before you guys have a long, long history of being exemplarily in many ways and in turn this question. What do you think are some of the reasons that the SAC in Illinois has been able to play such an important role for so long, with regard to the FAA and how it does its business?

Mark Myrent: Well, we have the FAA, so in terms of staffing we're able be fortunate enough to be recipients of some funding to actually support activities. I think having the capacity to be able to collect data in creative ways is important. One of the challenges that we always have in Illinois are within our criminal justice systems. We do not have nibers. We have antiquated UCR. We have some major deficiencies in our court, in probation and jail data sets. to try to be creative in exploiting the administrative passwords wherever possible. So between using industry record information, fiscal purposes, our corrections system data which is the strongest of the various components in Illinois in term of their data, and information that we generate ourselves. Programs, I think is a source of strength for us, its a matter of trying to not get bogged down with the deficiencies in your statistical data systems and try to come up with strategies and perhaps supplementing the strategies with things like survey information, and of environmental hands, and to see what those data when combined with one another.

Mark Myrent: This idea before when we talked about it in the context of DV, being able to one source data with the weakness of another, I think gives us more credibility when were for program need and not find and base it on one source that may be suspect, so that ability, and the ability to be able to out on that information in meaningful and creative ways I think is what our strength has been.

Stan: Mm-hmm (affirmative) don't know how to phrase that exactly, but do you think that the as it were, and so forth, has been won a long time ago in or do you feel able to promote your capability?
Mark Myrent: To promote our capability, there’s certain segments of the criminal justice system that have come to rely on us more extensively than others. We have very good working relationships with many of the other state agencies, police, department of corrections, administrative office, Illinois courts, we’re constantly trying to promote our credibility by not being seen as just consumers of the information, being takers, you might say, but some sort of a value-add to practitioners, makers, and programs developers at the local level, so we’re trying not to be too internalized in terms of how we use the data. Some of you have [inaudible 00:57:54] data tools that we’d made available on the website, those data tools are very much intended for use by a wide range of local officials. So again, we’re not trying to hide any of the information we have, we’re looking at ways of making data accessible, making it more understandable, we’re very cognizant of trying to include information about data quality in all the Access tools that we provide and we I think have established ourselves as a clearing house and business center, where they can not only get a hold of data, but a place that they can come for technical assistance working with that data and understanding it better.

Stan: And you think that that something happened that took a long time to do, and do you think that the, you know, that took a [inaudible 00:59:00] issue as well, in other words you have to have people who have the capability to provide that support.

Mark Myrent: It helps, I mean we are very blessed to be here. We have some folks here that have a technical capacity, able to [inaudible 00:59:24] data, to establish its utility available, tools able to incorporate that insight, so some of that, yeah I think is related some specialized individuals that we have at the agency that do have those skills and I guess what I’m saying is that if you can find folks like that, sometimes they’re a rare commodity in government, but if you have folks that know how to work with off-the-shelf software, to furnish information to your constituents [inaudible 01:00:15] that [inaudible 01:00:18] information and make it usable, and I think some of that involves establishing forums, being able to understand what the needs of those petitioners and program developers really are. They’re not operating oddly and making assumptions about what those data needs are without actually consulting with them, however you can do that, through open forums, survey instruments, by inserting yourselves at the meeting of your various professional associations, ask your probation officers, all those folks, it’s very very important to be able to ground all these efforts, that you’re not, you know I hate to use the word ivory-tower, but essentially operating with a blind eye toward what our real world needs are, people use the state [trails off 01:01:17]

Stan: On the phone, we put up the survey so if while you’re listening to us if you could take a few moments and complete that we would really appreciate it, and also I want to encourage you to keep asking your questions, just send them to [inaudible 01:01:34].
Stan: Mark what do you think, based on your experiences, what do you think SAC's can do to promote their capabilities to these [inaudible 01:01:45]?

Mark Myrent: I think you [inaudible 01:01:53] a partnership [inaudible 01:01:55] earlier that begins at a much earlier stage. We were at a point several years ago where.

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [01:02:04]

Mark Myrent: At a point several years ago where we were called into service at a point in the grant cycle where a lot of limitations on what we could really do. The idea of talking today about our role in the plan efforts, restructuring the program template ... intended to be a statement that to be really of a strong, to have a strong partnership with your grants administration staff, they have to respect you as a partner. That comes from involvement at very, very early stage of the process. When we first started this, asked for assistance after a program had been up and running for ... And the changes now will you help analyze this data so we can figure out if this program is doing its job or not. Or we're looking to getting some better data from this program.

Mark Myrent: It becomes more and more difficult ... point in the process comes late. I think to be able to build that type of trust relationship and to establish your value it ... have involvement at these early stages to ensure for example that the documentation that you're working really has value for the SAA.

Mark Myrent: That it's not sufficient ... not just the administrative requirements of grant administration, making sure that reports are in on time. Their paperwork is turned in on time. Payments go out on time. All the technical administrative reports are on time. I think that's backwards thinking.

Mark Myrent: I think that ... is accountable for the work that we do and ultimately as money gets tighter, I think we're all under a great deal of pressure to be able to have defensible methods to say that our grant investments are sound. And the only way that can take place is having that partnership in place between the staff and the administration's staff at a very early stage of program development. To the extent that you ... grants through an open RFP.

Mark Myrent: I encourage you to involve the SAC in the ... stage of an RFP. What are the elements of the ... based program that you want to include in that RFP?

Mark Myrent: Then again, I'm talking from the perspective of community based, client serving programs. I used to hear all the time, it wasn't necessary to be able to offer extensive guidance to local program officials on what they should to address a particular problem. Whether it was school drop outs or whether it's violence. Teen pregnancy ... of barometers and local officials know their neighborhoods well enough where they know what the best fit for their neighborhood. What the best program approach is.
And I think it's wrong not to respect local decision makers at the community level. It's incumbent upon the agency to offer more in the way of structure in certain choices of ... based approaches are to addressing a particular problem whether it's guns or gangs or drugs or what have you. And that's with the constituents to determine what the best program fit is, characteristics of their communities and the SAC is critical to that process because the locals don't know where to get this information. It's up to us to help them acquire it. But instruct them on the utility of that data is ...

And ... find yourself doing work for other ... active, of other folks outside of the SAA for example?

... ask for a lot of technical assistance. They are acquiring data. Interpreting data. Particularly with the criminal history record information where we have formalized the role in dispensing of that for research purposes.

We also have a contractual arrangement, data advisory group that administers the audits of juvenile justice delinquency prevention funding. They have their own research staff, so they contract with us, which takes us into juvenile justice research and compliance with mandates ... to things like measurement of portion minority contact.

And this is a stretch for us. And I don't know if this is realistic for the other SACs. I have been increasingly pulled into requests to assist in building databases for criminal justice purposes. We have to be somewhat selective there. Deciding whether it's something that has ... for our agency and whether we actually have the technical capacity to do that.

But the client database that I was briefly showing folks during this presentation has come somewhat of a ... I've been able to use as a launching point for types of ... provision programs. So we've used the same ... model. A juvenile re-entry module as well.

I think the more areas that you can develop these skills and capacities in going back to your question earlier Stan about how is it that you gain that type of acceptance and positive ... by practitioners and program officials. I think more versatility in the range of services you can provide, the more effective. In our ... right now so much on trying to add to that menu of services ... figure out how to better promote.

Again, our strong suit, the data tools that we've developed so that we're not just providing data on adhoc requests. Give people the ability to be able to play with that data themselves. Formulate their own analysis. Formulate their graphs and tables and maps and ... that it's underutilized.

Right now, we're trying to come up with some strategies on how to market those products and services better and thinking about how it is that people
actually conduct web-based searches ... to have the false notion that people would come to our agency ... products and services. And we know that's not true.

Mark Myrent: Think about how you do searches. You’re going to Google. Trying certain types of search terms and now starting to make some adjustments in how ... code up products and services so that they're discoverable ... searches ... ahead of it a little bit for some folks.

Mark Myrent: In terms of the question you asked as far as how do you gain your foothold ... just data and research, I think that marketing strategy, that web-based marketing strategy ... into it at some point ....

Stan: What about the leadership? How important do you think it is to have the SAA director and even the folks above that person and sort of their view of the value of research or analysis to the functioning of the SAA?

Mark Myrent: ... I think we’re very, very fortunate in that regard. We have a SAA director that has a high ... for the role of research in terms of shaping what we do and regularly ... If there’s any type of work that has to be ... not only in programs support but policy analysis as well. And the SAA director that is willing to promote the work of the SAC and ... gets passed on to our governor's office and legislature.

Mark Myrent: And we frequently get requests from both branches asking us a ... give us a capsule summary of everything that you know ... Tell us that you know ... approach in violence prevention ... IN a particular people legislation are being considered. Types of policy directions being considered by the governor's office. We are seen as a primary resource.

Mark Myrent: And again, our versatility works in our favor ... we don't know enough about this topic ... the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority and that really means contacting the SAC. We’re the ones that are in the position of being able to summarize the existing knowledge in a particular topic area.

Mark Myrent: And I'm fortunate enough to have the staff capacity where I can say, "Look, we have ... information back ... of that nature". Or to the governor's office, they want to move on this by later today or tomorrow. And through a combination of things that we've been able to put together here and our ability to do web searches and knowing what all the additional resources are for this type of information ... of program relevant summaries quickly.

Stan: Absolutely answers my question. And I do not see any other questions here so Mark, I want to thank you very much and well as everyone who’s on the phone who joined us today for the webinar.
We hope you enjoyed the presentation. Something we can follow up on for those of us who will be out in Breckenridge next month. If there’s ... this discussion, I certainly found it very interesting.

Join us for future webinars and as I said earlier, check back with ... presentation ... website and in a few days.

Thank you for joining us. Thank you Mark and everyone have a great afternoon.

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:33:04]

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PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [02:02:43]