

Developing an Evidence Base for Your Innovative Prosecution Strategy

The Innovative Prosecution Solutions for Combating Violent Crime (IPS) initiative, funded by the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), supports prosecutor-led teams that often working with law enforcement officers, other first responders, and behavioral health professionals to solve critical public safety issues in their jurisdictions. Using novel crime reduction strategies and approaches, prosecutors around the country aim to reduce violent crime, curtail the opioid epidemic, mitigate human trafficking victimization, and reduce justice-system involvement of young adults and youth. Many IPS grantees have found it advantageous to partner with a researcher who assists with planning, evaluating, and disseminating findings of the project to wider audiences.

The purpose of the IPS initiative is to provide prosecutors with resources and support to reduce crime and increase public safety. The program encourages prosecutors and agencies to take an evidence-based approach—that is, to use data in the development of their strategies and programs and to develop effective, economical, and innovative responses to crime within their jurisdictions. Grantees will use their grant award to develop, test, or expand these strategies or programs with the intention to show progress towards prosecutorial outcomes by the end of the grant period. Grantees are also encouraged to share lessons learned from the implementation process to support other jurisdictions who have a similar need.

IPS grantees are required to monitor and assess the implementation or impact of the selected strategy through a standardized set of performance measures; however, grantees who want to develop a full program model should consider a more expansive process to determine if their particular strategy is achieving its goals or objectives. The purpose of this brief is to guide grantees through the process of examining the implementation and impact of their selected strategy. In this brief, we will define the different types of assessments that grantees can use, share case studies of existing grantees' assessments, and provide additional resources.

What are Ways to Assess Implementation of Your IPS Strategy?

There are many ways to assess a prosecution strategy. Thus, it is important to first define and outline what an implementation assessment is, and to contextualize an implementation assessment in relation to other types of assessment that may be useful in building an evidence base.

Assessment falls into one of two broad categories: formative and summative.

Formative assessments identify needs or problems or examine how a strategy operates. They are conducted during the development and implementation of a program or practice and are useful to determine how to best achieve intended goals or improve the strategy or outcomes.

Summative assessments measure outcomes, impact, or performance. They should be completed once the dimensions of the program or practice are well-established. This type of assessment helps determine the extent to which the program or practice is achieving its goals.

Outcome and impact assessments have historically been used interchangeably or with varied definitions. In this brief, we make distinctions between impact and outcome assessments; we refer to **outcome assessments** as a way to measure if the strategy achieved short-term objectives and outcomes, such as reduced caseloads or increased interagency collaboration. We refer to **impact assessments** as a way to measure more long-term outcomes, such as reduced homicides. The following table details the different types of assessments, what is the purpose of the assessment, and example questions that this assessment can answer.

Types of Assessments	Purpose	Questions This Assessment Can Answer
Needs Assessment and Problem Identification (<i>formative</i>)	To identify needs and determine if needs are being met with the program model—usually done during the program, particularly at key development stages	What are factors leading to the problem? What practices or program services are needed to reduce the problem?
Implementation Assessment (<i>summative</i>)	To demonstrate if the program/strategy is being delivered as intended and to document implementation issues	Are the services being delivered as intended to the target members of Community X? To what extent is the program operating as intended, and why? What modifications to the program or strategy may be needed to improve

		implementation or outcomes?
Outcome Assessment (summative)	To show if desired objectives and intermediate outcomes are being achieved	Did the program result in the expected short-term or intermediate-term outcomes (e.g., reduced caseloads, increased prosecution of domestic violence cases)?
Impact Assessment (summative)	To show if the program is effective at achieving outcomes	Did the program result in the expected long-term outcomes (e.g., reductions in recidivism, reduced gun-homicides)?
Performance Measures (summative)	To show a program's progress and accomplishments using pre-selected measures	How many referrals to services is Program A providing each quarter? How many personnel were hired? How many technology solutions implemented? At Time X, what is the status of implementation?
Implementation Research	To help guide evidence-based research into local practice	How can the practice be scaled up to other types of cases without losing effectiveness? How can this program be more equitable in terms of who enrolls in and successfully completes the program?

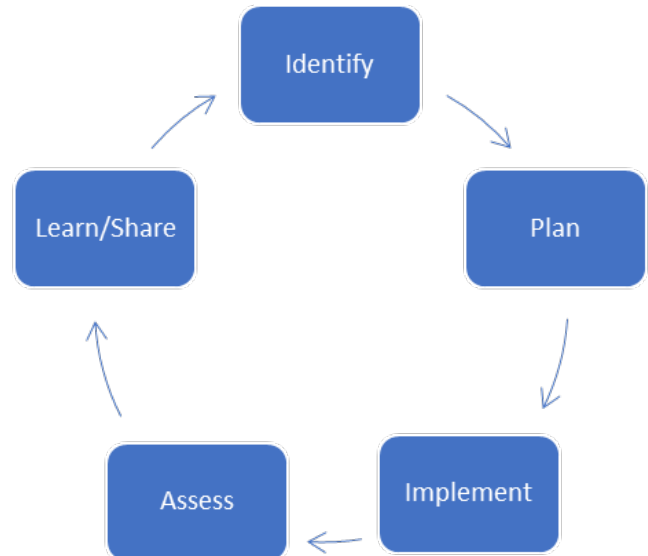
From https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dch/programs/healthycommunitiesprogram/tools/pdf/eval_planning.pdf

How Do You Build an Evidence Base for Your IPS Strategy?

1. Identify the need and extent of the crime problem by examining data trends, engaging with diverse stakeholders and existing participants/community members, and reviewing agency operations. Based on these needs, identify or develop a formal practice or program that can be used to address the identified needs and gaps. Identify baseline data to help develop a benchmark before implementation.
2. Plan for implementation by developing an implementation plan. Develop an **implementation assessment** throughout to determine if the program or practice is operating as intended and determine areas for refinement. For longer projects, develop an **outcome assessment** plan to assess if objectives are being achieved and are reaching the desired outcomes. Best practices are to develop the assessment plan by first creating a program or practice **logic model** that details:
 - a. **Inputs:** These are the resources available for a program, such as funding, staff, program infrastructure, and partnerships.
 - b. **Activities:** These are what a program actually does to bring about the intended change.

- c. **Outputs:** These are the products or direct services resulting from the program activities. Outputs are the direct evidence of implemented activities such as program enrollment numbers.
- d. **Short-term and intermediate outcomes** represent the most immediate effects attributable to a program, such as changes in knowledge and attitudes.
- e. **Long-term outcomes** are the conditions that change as a result the program. These outcomes are more distant in time, less attributable to the program, and harder to measure (e.g., reduced homicides).

3. Implement the identified/developed program or practice model. Monitor the progress by collecting and reviewing implementation or operational data (e.g., **performance metrics**). Collect additional data needed to monitor implementation and outcomes (e.g., services reach, fidelity to program model, amount of services or resources provided, changes in recidivism outcomes).



- 4. Identify gaps in data you need to monitor implementation and outcomes. Triangulate data from multiple sources if needed to help contextualize your assessment (e.g., conducting participants interviews and examining program data to understand program success).
- 5. Share lessons learned from the assessment with key stakeholders and participants to provide and receive feedback about your strategy, to better understand what your assessment means to stakeholder groups, and to increase buy-in to sustain program implementation.
- 6. Additionally, share evidence from your assessment with other communities to help inform their program development and aid in any practice replication. Determine how the evidence generated by your assessment can be used to improve the existing program or practice, develop a new program/practice, or identify a new or continued need.

Examples of Implementation Assessments Conducted by IPS Grantees

San Diego, California (IPS Grantee FY2017)

The purpose of the San Diego Association of Government's (SANDAG) IPS grant was to enhance and expand their Community Justice Initiative (CJI) by (1) conducting standardized risks and needs assessments on clients; (2) improving linkages of clients to service providers; (3) using data to inform decisions and strategies by improving documentation; and (4) improving community engagement. To determine whether they accomplished these goals, SANDAG's Applied Research Division conducted an implementation and outcome assessment that leveraged data from meeting minutes, a program partner survey, crime and risk assessment administrative data, program completion and services data, and data from 334 client exit surveys.

The **implementation assessment** involved documenting the number of individuals who accepted the CJI offer and their characteristics (e.g., demographics, offense type, categorical risk scores, and services needed). The assessment also used a partner survey to assess how project partners view implementation and expansion, areas for improvement, views on the collaborative process, perceptions of the program design, and usefulness of risk and needs assessment.

For the **outcome assessment**, the research partner used a mix-method, quasi-experimental pre/post design using a historical comparison group to assess the effectiveness of the enhanced and expanded CJI for improving client outcomes. Propensity score matching was used to draw a historical comparison group to compare to the treatment group that received an offer of CJI by the City Attorney to a prospective client that was accepted with an intake date between April 26, 2016 and October 5, 2017. The comparison group was drawn from all filed cases by the City Attorney between November 1, 2012 and November 1, 2013 and where the case reached disposition prior to November 1, 2014 (i.e., the start of CJI).

Denver, Colorado (IPS Grantee FY2019)

The goal of Denver's IPS strategy is to establish a collaborative digital evidence task force and to increase capacity within the Denver District Attorney's office and Denver Police Department to use digital evidence for investigating and prosecuting gang-related violent crimes. Despite the growing popularity of multidisciplinary teams, relatively little research has addressed how these teams develop over time and their impact on criminal justice outcomes. As such, communities nationally lack data to guide replication and implementation of multidisciplinary teams locally. Denver's current **implementation assessment** questions, therefore, focus on documenting and assessing the development of a collaboration across prosecution, law enforcement, and technology agencies to improve the use of digital evidence to prosecute violent crimes.

Specifically, this assessment involves the collection of data to evaluate the multidisciplinary team's progress towards their goals as well as to share new knowledge about the development and impact of their efforts with the field. The assessment will be informed by administrative data, pre-/post-tests from trainings, interviews with task force members, and meeting notes. Studying the process in Denver will allow for inferences about actions that communities can take nationally to developing multidisciplinary team responses to crime. In the proposed dissemination plan, findings will be regularly summarized to the task force, to policy makers and practitioners, and to the academic community.

Concluding Thoughts

For IPS grantees, it may be tempting to solely assess outcomes to prove your selected strategy “works”. However, be mindful that the relatively short length of the grant period coupled with the use of innovative, adapting practices and a small target population may not make a rigorous and thorough outcome assessment feasible. In these scenarios, it may be more practical to develop a strong process assessment plan that is rooted in:

- Understanding and finalizing your strategy through a series of piloting, assessing, and refining.

- Determining what outcomes may result from the strategy being put into place, and what data are needed to capture and measure this. Once data are identified and captured, start to track outcomes.
- Building a sustainable infrastructure with relevant data, partners, and other resources to implement and routinely assess.
- Examining if there are differences in your target population in comparison to the individuals who are actually being affected and impacted by the strategy.

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