

Innovative Prosecution Solutions Learning Community

Part I: Introduction

Key Takeaways

As home to the IPS Research and Evaluation Training and Technical Assistance team, RTI International has developed a webinar series to support the creation and ongoing engagement of a learning community of local researchers and practitioners interested in discussing evaluation-related topic areas, sharing methodological techniques, and addressing problem-solving challenges in carrying out applied research. The first webinar in this series was held on April 10, 2019. The goal of this introductory webinar was to bring together researchers and practitioners to begin a dialogue about their IPS implementation experiences – to share information, successes and challenges, and lessons learned. Participants described their sites’ prosecutorial approaches, which highlighted the diversity of IPS focus areas — gun-related crime, domestic violence, gang-related violent crime, human trafficking, and opioid-related crimes. Some of the key take-aways from the discussion about successes, challenges, and lessons learned include the following:

Successes and Lessons Learned

- Using social media data, like images of a defendant flashing gang signs, helps to inform bond and bond amount recommendations and build a case for prosecution.
- Analysis of historical data helps to identify individuals at highest risk of repeat offending.
- Collaboration and information-sharing across agencies benefit local crime reduction efforts.
- Building and maintaining a strong partnership between the prosecutor’s office and local law enforcement can be key to successful implementation of an IPS strategy.
- Diversion programs with an individualized approach help people who engage with these programs avoid prosecution and the collateral consequences that follow and link participants to behavioral health treatment and other services they may need.

Common Challenges

- Individuals implementing innovative practices or programs may face resistance to change because of a culture ingrained in “business as usual” approaches. Focusing on getting buy-in at all organizational levels can be key to fostering acceptance of new approaches.
- Establishing new roles or partnerships can create “turf battles” that hinder collaboration and information-sharing. Building trust and open lines of communication can be essential for avoiding conflict.
- Changes external to the IPS initiative, like a change in state law or leadership in a partnering agency, might require adjustment to or a re-design of the project. Meeting these challenges requires practitioners and researchers to be nimble in their approaches to strategy implementation and assessment.
- Taking successful pilot practices and programs to scale can present new challenges.
- For evaluation, the nature of IPS strategies can impact evaluation designs and methods. For example, researchers are prohibited from observing grand jury proceedings because they are not public. This means that researchers cannot develop case-specific understanding of these proceedings and must rely on general experiences and impressions from secondary sources. Additionally, small study samples due to low or slow case flow can derail a rigorous evaluation of the impact of a strategy or program. Finally, in jurisdictions implementing multiple initiatives,

it can be difficult to tease out the impact of any one initiative. A strong researcher-practitioner partnership can help problem-solve to successfully execute a sound evaluation within a real-world setting.

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