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Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grants: Assessing Initial Implementation

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This Research for Policy is based on "Juvenile Accountability Block Grant Program: National Evaluation," by Dale G. Parent and Liz Barnett, final report to the National Institute of Justice (2003), NCJ 202150, available at www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/202150.pdf. Mr. Parent is a Senior Associate and Ms. Barnett is an Associate at Abt Associates Inc.

The Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant (JAIBG) program helped States and localities continue or expand policies that hold young offenders more responsible for their actions and impose increasingly serious sanctions for each delinquent or criminal act, according to a National Institute of Justice (NIJ) evaluation. The process evaluation also found that the program generally achieved congressional goals set for it, including stimulating greater collaboration between State and local agencies. (See "Objectives of the Evaluation.")

Legislative intent of JAIBG

Congress created JAIBG in 1997 to encourage States and localities to strengthen prosecution and adjudication of juvenile offenders, particularly those convicted of serious, violent crime.

Objectives of the Evaluation

NIJ's evaluation examined JAIBG's implementation during its initial years. This process evaluation, conducted by Abt Associates Inc., was not intended to gauge the program's impact on juvenile crime. Rather, it was designed to evaluate how the block grant funds were spent and how States and localities conformed to the policy objectives envisioned by Congress.

Evaluators analyzed funding data from FY 1998, 1999, and 2000 and gathered indepth information through a survey of a sample of FY 1998 programs. They also interviewed State and local program planners, administrators, and staff annually from 1999 to 2002 and made two site visits to each of six States in 2001 and 2003. The study's full report is online at: www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/grants/202150.pdf

The legislation specified five policy goals and required States to certify either (1) that their existing laws and practices reflected more stringent juvenile justice policies or (2) that they had actively considered five policy goals spelled out in the legislation. Congress also named 12 broad purposes for which the funds could be used.

Although the legislation did not relate the program's goals to specific activities or "purpose areas," these are presented for FY 1998, for demonstration purposes, in exhibit 1.

In creating JAIBG, Congress expected States and Territories to pass the bulk of JAIBG funds to local governments,

Exhibit 1. Use of JAIBG funds, FY 1998

Policy Goal	Purpose Area	Percentage of Funds Used	
Increase use of graduated sanctions	Capital improvements	13	
	Accountability-based sanctions	19	
	Hiring prosecutors	9	
	Funding for courts and probation offices to hold juveniles accountable	17	
	Gun courts	0.02	
	Drug courts	4	
	Accountability-based programs with law enforcement components	9	
		71	**($140.5 million)**
Encourage prosecution of serious juvenile offenders as adults	Hiring judges, probation officers, and defenders	5	
	Funding for prosecutors to address drug, gang, and youth violence	2	
	Funding for technology, equipment, and training to assist prosecutors	6	
		13	**($27.7 million)**
Make adult/juvenile criminal records systems comparable	Interagency information sharing	**16**	**($33.1 million)**
Establish appropriate drug testing	Implementing drug-testing policies	**2**	**($2.7 million)**
Promote parental responsibility	None		

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

but allowed flexibility to adapt funding to State laws, policies, and practices. All 56 States and Territories received funding; 35 passed at least 75 percent of that to local units of government. The remaining 21 obtained a waiver allowing them to distribute less than 75 percent of JAIBG funds to local governments. Nine of the 21 proposed retaining all funds at the State level on the grounds that local governments had no role in providing or funding juvenile justice services.

To enhance collaboration, localities often formed regional coalitions that offered economies of scale, enabled them to pool resources, and freed funds for new programs.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) began awarding JAIBG funds in 1998. States made 228 awards to local grantees, and local governments made 1,148 awards to local grantees. State and local governments emphasized different goals and purposes in making awards. For example, local governments spent 7 percent of JAIBG funds on graduated sanctions and 13 percent on interagency information sharing; State governments spent 56 percent on graduated sanctions and 22 percent on interagency information sharing.

In FY 1998 and 1999, Congress appropriated $232 million each year; in FY 2000, $221 million. Evaluators concluded that the States and OJJDP successfully implemented JAIBG within tight time limits.

Key findings of the evaluation

States conformed substantially to four of the five policy goals Congress identified for JAIBG. Key findings for each of goal follow.

Increase use of graduated sanctions. JAIBG required jurisdictions to consider policies that sanctioned young offenders each time they were adjudicated or convicted of a delinquent or criminal act, including probation violations. The program encouraged use of graduated sanctions that increased in severity with each subsequent, more serious offense. Evaluators found that 45 of the 56 jurisdictions met this

requirement. On average, States and localities used almost three-fourths of their funds to expand the range of graduated sanctions, including practices such as intensive probation, restitution, community service, and day treatment.

Encourage prosecution of serious juvenile offenders as adults. JAIBG required that States and localities have or consider adopting policies to prosecute as adults juveniles over the age of 15 who commit serious, violent crimes. Of the 56 jurisdictions receiving funds, 42 reported that their policies conformed to this objective. As the trend in States had been toward toughening juvenile transfer laws, 39 States had such policies when the program began; by 2001, three additional States had enacted laws or adopted policies that strengthened transfer policies. States allocated an average of 11 percent of JAIBG funds in FY 1998–2000 to strengthening prosecution of serious, violent juvenile offenders.

Make adult and juvenile criminal records systems comparable. The program encouraged development of juvenile records systems that paralleled those of adult criminal history systems. When the evaluation concluded, most States had not met this objective, but evaluators pointed out that developing comparable record systems would require years of debate, planning, funding, and implementation. However, States and localities awarded more than 13 percent of their JAIBG funds to juvenile justice information systems. By improving and linking information among law enforcement, courts, prosecutors, and human services agencies, States enhanced the climate for better planning, management, and multiagency collaboration, the evaluation concluded.

Establish appropriate juvenile drug testing policies. JAIBG also encouraged States to establish substance abuse testing for juvenile offenders. States could decide which testing policies

were appropriate for particular categories of young offenders. Most States (43) had such policies at the program's inception. By the January 1999 deadline, all States had complied with this objective, although they allocated relatively small amounts of funds to it.

Promote parental responsibility for juvenile supervision. The program required States to certify that no law prevented juvenile courts from holding parents, guardians, or custodians responsible for supervising their delinquent children and ensuring that they obey court orders, such as curfews and reporting requirements. In 1998, no State had a law that infringed on the court's authority in this area. Subsequently, New Hampshire enacted legislation affirmatively establishing this responsibility. By the study's end, all States permitted judges to hold parents accountable for their delinquent children.

Suggestions for improving JAIBG

The evaluation recommended improvements in JAIBG, including continuing emphasis on and expansion of regional coalitions where feasible. The study also recommended extending the deadline for spending grant funds, which was cited as a problem in interviews with program staff. Recent legislation has addressed some of these issues in changes to the JAIBG program.[1]

Block grant programs such as JAIBG present challenges to evaluation because projects cannot be compelled to participate in impact evaluations, nor can a small number of program models be identified for intensive evaluations. Government monitoring of the program, on the other hand, typically provides data on how projects were administered rather than on their results. To improve future assessments of JAIBG, evaluators recommended performance measurement,

which falls between monitoring and impact evaluation. Such a system could yield benchmarks to inform policy choices and indicate strategies to improve performance.

JAIBG has assisted States in upgrading juvenile justice management information systems. Thus, States are the logical entities to obtain more useful data from grant recipients and use performance reports to ensure effective use of juvenile justice resources.

Notes

1. Department of Justice Authorization Act for FY 2003 (Public Law 107–273). See also Andrews, C., and L. Marble, *Changes to OJJDP's Juvenile Accountability Program*, Juvenile Justice Bulletin, Washington, DC; U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, June 2003, NCJ 200220.

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Findings and conclusions of the research reported here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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