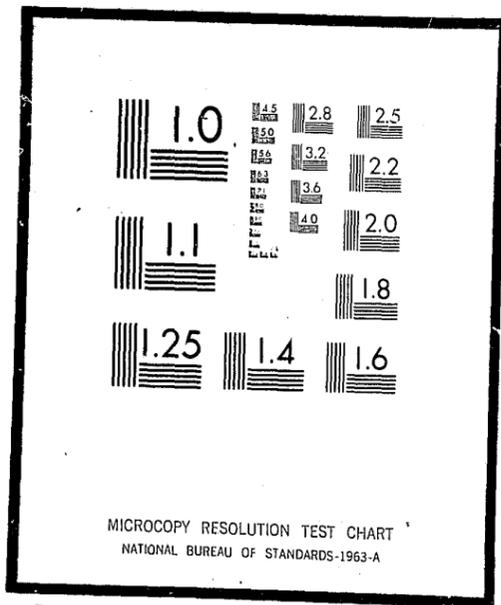


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LEAA

Final Evaluation Report

June, 1975

Philadelphia -
City Probation Department, Research and Development Unit,
PH-74-CC-P4-5-279

Submitted to: Kenneth J. Reichstein, Ph.D.
Chief, Evaluation and Monitoring Unit
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Philadelphia, Pa.

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Evaluator

Period of Project Activity Evaluated: R & D Unit activities from February through June, 1975 are evaluated in this report.

Brief Description of Project Functions and Activities: The R & D Unit is a multi-function organization. It represents the department and maintains continuing liaison with the Courts, the Governor's Justice Commission, LEAA funded projects specifically, and other related bodies of the local criminal justice network. In relation to LEAA it assists departmental staff in preparing grant proposals, provides services to LEAA outside evaluators, and maintains an ongoing overview of such projects around fiscal and technical matters. In addition the Unit provides administrative and other support to the Chief Probation Officer and to various of his administrative staff both in relation to internal matters and community relations.

R & D maintains and updates an information base consisting of both computer and manual data operations. It provides regular reports on the data base within the department.

R & D also engages in research and planning activities, sometimes in relation to LEAA grants and also around other projects. R & D also takes on or initiates other projects as well, specifically this year a Policy and Procedures Manual and a Judges Manual.

Response of Project to the Refunding Evaluation Recommendations:
(This refers to the Evaluator's report of February 27, 1975)

The following are the recommendations made at that time together with a brief comment by the evaluator on the project response in the intervening 3-4 months.

1. "That goals and activities in the subgrant application be expressed in measurable terms amenable to evaluation. This should include time-defined interim goals"

Evaluator's Comment: The project subgrant application for 1975-6 shows considerable improvement in the specificity of objectives and provision of time-defined goals.

2. "That priority be given to building those contacts, activities and relationships which can provide input and feedback to and from project staff throughout the department."

Evaluator's Comment: The project staff have engaged in an extensive out-reach through group interviews with a majority of departmental line staff. Evaluation findings (see below) indicate positive impact from this activity.

3. "That organizational analysis focused on alternate structural arrangements be engaged in as a possible aid in resolving the differences (or meliorating them) referred to above in the findings section of this report."

Evaluator's Comment: While discussions on this have taken place between evaluator and project staff there is as yet no shared definition of the situation. Further inquiry in this area will constitute an evaluation focus for the 1975-6 project year.

4. "Now that the LEAA grant period is over the project is urged to move ahead and attempt to meet goals in a number of areas specified in the subgrant application and referred to under results above."

Evaluator's Comment: Since March the project has produced substantial activity and productivity around a number of its objectives.

5. "That activities projected for the next subgrant year be somewhat more limited than is currently the case, and that especially where research and planning activities are concerned the resource strains within the project be carefully considered in advancing objectives in those two areas."

Evaluator's Comment: The subgrant application for the 1975-6 project year embodies this recommendation in a satisfactory manner.

Feedback Processes: The first two months (January, February, 1975) of the evaluation process did not produce a sense of mutuality and reciprocity between evaluator and project staff. However, since then a series of departmental and team meetings with the evaluator, his visit to a training class for R & D staff, and greater time for a process of mutual consultation results in a different picture. At this point in time the evaluator's judgment is that his feedback is responded to in an increasingly open manner and that there is increasing space for consultative kinds of feedback which the project staff value.

SPECIFIC PROJECT ACTIVITIES, EVALUATION
ACTIVITIES, AND THE FINDINGS

1. Policy and Procedures Manual: The objective was to produce and distribute this Manual during the 1974-75 project year.

Evaluation: The Manual is almost complete but not yet distributed. Selected sections, in final form, were reviewed and were found to achieve a high order of clarity, communicability and consistency.

2. Judges Manual: The objective was to produce and distribute this Manual during the 1974-75 project year.

Evaluation: The Manual still awaits R & D unit editing. It was read as is and a generally favorable impression was generated as to its possible value to Judges in making the best use of Probation Department services in sentencing decisions.

3. Information Base: The objectives for the information base are part of an ongoing attempt by R & D to construct a data base on which more rational decision-making can be made, better data generated for outside evaluators, and more focused research can be developed.

Evaluation: The previous refunding evaluation tested the accuracy of the Information Base and found it to be quite good. Evaluation in these last several months has constituted an ongoing process to better understand the data dictionary, data elements, and the processes by which data is received, coded and summarized.

The evaluator's finding is that a major improvement is noted in respect to availability. Problems remain. One major is that R & D staff have no direct access to the Court's Computer. The other is that much data in manual form needs to be converted into computerized systems.

Generally speaking, these last several months indicate progress towards the ultimate objectives outlined above.

4. Improvement of communication and relationships within the Department: The major vehicle in behalf of this objective was an intensive training course on group process and group interviewing for the R & D staff - followed by conjoint group interviews with just about every departmental service unit in which issues around information base, the employment study, and the R & D unit were discussed.

Evaluation: The evaluator attended a session of the training course and provided feedback on the spot. In addition, a phone survey of two randomly selected probation officers from each unit visited was done. The officers were asked to comment on three

issues: the openness of R & D staff to feedback, the possibility of working relationships with R & D staff; and their understanding of R & D functions.

The results of the survey are strikingly positive, although very fragile indeed. The evaluator's impressions from the training session was the R & D staff were committed to an improved communication process and this must have been transmitted to probation officers.

An overwhelming majority of the respondents indicated considerable improvement from the survey done on the same issues in February of 1975. 24 of 30 respondents felt the staff to be open to feedback, and 23 of 30 felt there was a basis for mutuality. On the issues of understanding R & D functions there is a different response, with 17 of 30 feeling that this was communicated effectively.

A good beginning seems to have been made. Continued priority is necessary in this area of effective communication. Many of the respondents said they felt positive but were taking a "wait and see attitude", or "were waiting to see if they came back", or "I'm not really sure."

5. Effectiveness of Services to Outside and related criminal justice agencies: The R & D unit sees as one of its objectives participation in and service to a variety of criminal justice agencies.

Evaluation: The refunding evaluation report indicated that LEAA outside evaluators had a generally positive attitude towards the services provided them by R & D. During this period a telephone survey of 8 representatives of 15 agencies with which the R & D unit interact frequently was done.

The respondents indicated an overwhelming positive attitude about their contacts with R & D. Such phrases as: "always cooperative, always prepared, easily available, follow through" were common.

6. The Employment Study: The objective for 1974-5 was to do an Employment Study as the basis for expanded employment services.

Evaluation: The substantial work on this study was triggered by the unit interviews referred to above. At this point in time the staff are busy tabulating the information gained from these interviews and developing the next stage in the research.

Clearly this project was not completed as projected. At the same time the inclusion of probation officers as consultants in its development is a wise move. Evaluation for the 1975-6 project year will determine at that time what kind of product results from this process.

7. The Predictive Study (Case Classification): The objective of this study was to produce an instrument for use by probation officers which could have high predictive power in differentiating their caseloads. (ie: those probationers requiring minimal supervision from those requiring intensive supervision).

Evaluation: Several other factors complicated this study. One was the continuing nagging problem of the Courts' Computer - resulting in delays of several months in securing printouts. The second was that the seven federally funded projects had their own outside evaluator who was also focused in on the predictive study. At a recent meeting the R & D Unit relinquished any further work on this project to the outside evaluator.

Discussions with R & D staff, the outside evaluator, and analysis of the predictive instrument and related documents indicates that workmanlike job was done in producing an instrument which can at least provide a beginning step in line with the objective of case classification.

Some dispute exists as to whether a new instrument was needed or whether some other instrument, previously developed elsewhere, might have been used. This evaluator's bias is towards the procedure followed here - the development of a new instrument.

8. Other Research and Planning Activities: In the subgrant application reference was made to planning and research activities other than those specifically referred to and already described in this report.

Evaluation: This area remains hazy to the evaluator. More extensive contacts with the staff permitted a better sense of their professional competence and approach than heretofore gleaned from reading their documents. A site visit by the evaluator to the Massachusetts Probation Dept's Research and Planning Units was followed by an extensive and free-wheeling discussion with R & D staff. This discussion yielded considerable awareness of both the general and specific processes which characterize such operations in the criminal justice field.

The evaluator still remains unclear, however, as to the mix of research and planning within the R & D unit, whether such specializations are functionally useful, and whether output is what it might be. These remain on the agenda of unanswered questions which the 1975-6 evaluation can address itself to.

9. The R & D Unit and the Probation Department: In the subgrant application and as a result of evaluation activity the fact emerges, with considerable clarity, that the R & D unit has a strategic role in influencing department policy and the direction of services to its clients.

Evaluation: Continuing contact with R & D staff, the above-mentioned site visit to Massachusetts and sharper awareness of overall departmental functions raises the question of to what extent the R & D unit recognizes its own policy and program influence in a purposive, self-conscious and planful

manner. Of course, one issue at play is the relationship between the technician (R & D) and the administrator(s). As in all organizations there appears to be a delicate interplay between those activities mandated by administration and those activities initiated and developed by the technicians. It is clear from the previous refocusing evaluation that different segments of the administration view R & D's function and influence with varied values.

At this point in time the evaluator must once again refer further inquiry into this area to the next program year's evaluation. Far greater attention will be paid to the interface of the Unit with influential administrators and decision-makers in the Probation Department. Corollary to this evaluation will inquire further into the general approach and issues which the R & D staff develop as their priorities; be these autonomously conceived or collegially evolved with others. Such a policy input focus should help clarify other questions as to R & D activities generally, the structure of the unit, and its output(s).

10. Organizational Structure and Function of the Unit: One reasonable area of inquiry is the degree to which the inter-personal shape and ethos of the Unit may facilitate or inhibit the greatest productivity in pursuit of its goals.

Evaluation: The above-mentioned site visit, a wider spread of evaluator contact with staff, analysis of a variety of documents, and analysis of staff time sheets over a two-week period in May provides data.

Although findings are tentative the evaluator is not sure that the lines of authority and functional divisions are maximally efficient. In the present structure considerable time appears to be taken up with one-to-one communications between staff and those immediately above and below them; and at the same time a host of functional interactions which cross such authority lines as well as the functional subdivisions are also occurring. In addition, meetings occur which involve segments of staff, both within functional divisions and within similar positions in the authority structure. It may well be that all such interactions facilitate the work process. It may also be that undue amounts of time are spent in clarifying communication and processing issues not intrinsic to the task - but rather which are rather spinoffs of the Unit structure itself.

A priority, once again, for next year's evaluation, will be a more thorough structural inquiry and study of work processes in the unit. The evaluator intends to be 'more on the scene' focusing on process evaluation now that the parameters of the R & D unit have been identified.

-7-

Recommendations:

1. Where the policy and procedures manual and Judges manual are concerned evaluative and feedback procedures be formulated so that an assessment of user response can be made.

2. Where the employment study is concerned staff are urged to preserve documents which may illustrate the range of consultation and collaboration which are part of this continuing project.

3. As indicated above the recent staff interviews throughout the department improved attitudes towards R & D considerably. This is a very fragile situation, however, and it is strongly urged that the project make provision for formal activities of a similar nature in order to reinforce and extend this process. It is clear that failure to do so will effectively wipe away the gains.

4. That the project staff itself consider whether some form of self-study around its policy role in the department and its own internal structure might be useful.

5. To continue the refinement of the Data Base Report and significantly increase the number of data elements available within the computer information base. As it now stands a relatively small proportion of available data is in machine processable format. Increasingly efficient data analysis, which is necessary in such a large department, rests on computer use.

6. Improved access to a computer facility for the storage, retrieval and analysis of data is needed. The current arrangements, using the Courts computer as it is now set up seems inadequate for the departmental research and development operation. Whether this can best be accomplished through a revised access to the Courts computer, purchase of time in another facility, or some other method needs to be explored.

END