

# THE BELLRINGER

"A PERIODIC REVIEW OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE EVALUATION"

SPA EVALUATION AND LEAA

July, 1978

Issue 7

On June 1, 1978 evaluators from six SPA's and the director of the National Conference of State Criminal Justice Planning Administrators met with representatives of LEAA to discuss and resolve the evaluation issues presented in the May BELLRINGER.

Thirteen issues were originally proposed: Budget cuts, training, evaluation clearinghouse, progress report and 519 requirements, intensive evaluations, discretionary evaluations and LEAA use of local evaluation information, national workshop, new evaluation units, correct evaluations, information dissemination, planning and evaluation, RPU and operating agency evaluations, and contract evaluations. Three other items were added to the agenda for discussion: New directions for the national evaluation program, juvenile justice evaluation, and redefining evaluations.

Of the 16 items, four were resolved; eight were discussed and general agreement reached (but not resolved) as to what happens next; one item was discussed with no agreement; two items were not really discussed; and one item was discussed and sort of agreed on.

The next meeting of this group is scheduled for October 1978. Half of the agenda is to be prepared by evaluators, half by LEAA.

### Budget Cuts

No resolution was made regarding proposed cuts in evaluation staff.

### IN THIS ISSUE

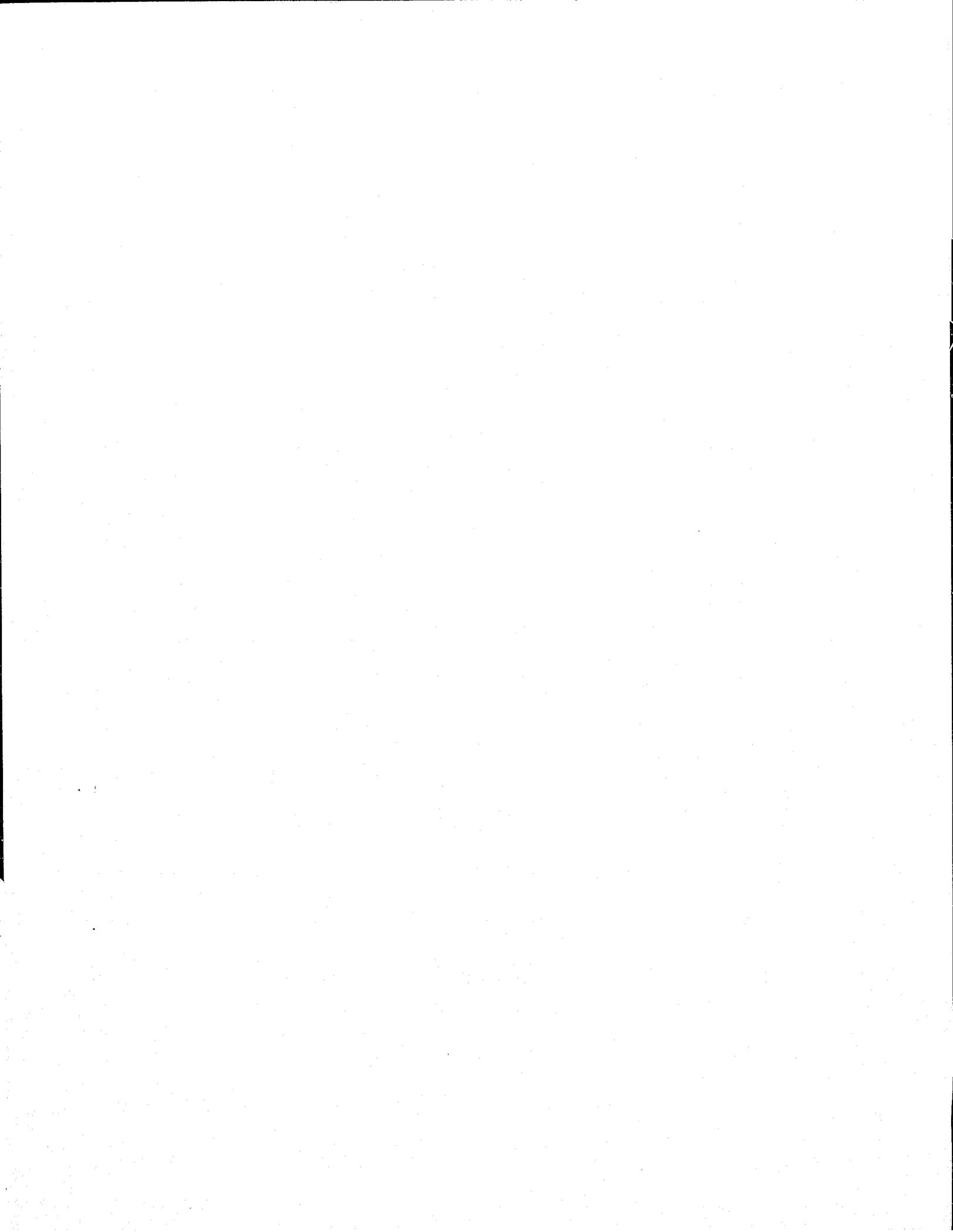
- EVAL  Inside Versus Outside Evaluation Research
- EVAL  The Model Evaluation Program
- Judicial Administrative District Evaluation
- EVAL  Current List of Evaluation Contacts

NCJRS

AUG 0 8 1978

ACQUISITIONS

50031  
50032  
50033



## THE MODEL EVALUATION PROGRAM

### MAJOR FINDINGS

The Model Evaluation Program (MEP) demonstrates that utilization of evaluation is achieved when the decision maker is actively involved in production of the evaluation and owns the final product. Simply providing information does not result in its use.

### OVERVIEW

In 1975, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) awarded grants to 12 federally funded planning agencies to design, set up and test evaluation systems. The state and local planning agencies are established by the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 to carry out the planning and funding processes authorized by the Act. During recent years, these agencies annually disbursed over six-hundred million dollars in grants for projects to state and local levels of government.

The original MEP request for proposal contained three success criteria: (1) evaluation information would be used; (2) evaluation would contribute to the achievement of agency objectives; and (3) the demonstrated evaluation system would be continued if it proved to be useful. The evaluation systems tested by the grantees were to be assessed on these three criteria.

In March 1978 an assessment of the MEP was published by the Urban Institute. At that time eight of the twelve sites had completed testing evaluation systems, four were still in progress.

Of the eight completed sites, only one failed to produce evaluation information. Examination of how the information was used at the seven remaining sites led to the conclusion that four sites had demonstrated that they identified and met a real demand for information. For these sites, the information produced was used by decision makers to change policies and programs.

Two other sites produced information but did not get it used. They appeared to be providing a free good service for which there was not a clear need. The remaining site was associated with the production of useful information, but it was not demonstrated that the MEP system was the principal reason the information was produced and used. Other resources and organizational units were independently producing the information.

The evaluation systems tested varied considerably on a number of operating characteristics: study methods; production levels; types of agency evaluation product; cost per product; standardization of the production process; and mechanisms to involve the user. The only system characteristic associated with success on the use criteria was the active involvement of the user in directing or producing the study. The method, sophistication, or cost of the evaluation did not make a difference to whether or not it was used.

Three of the eight agencies planned to continue the tested systems at the end of the MEP, but with significant modifications. Consequently, the long-term fate of the three systems is uncertain. The discontinuation decisions at the five other MEP sites were based on a variety of judgments, including: failure to implement the desired evaluation system; product perceived as not useful; and severe agency budget cuts prevent continuation.

For one of the MEP success criteria--"evaluation would contribute to the achievement of agency objectives"--no site was able to demonstrate success. None of the 12 grantees attempted to develop or measure the planning agency objectives, nor were any of the sites able to demonstrate that the evaluation systems tested helped the agency achieve their objectives.

While the continuation decisions are uncertain and there is no evidence of improved agency performance, half of the MEP grantees were able to demonstrate that useful information was produced. This result is surprising, since most examinations of evaluation utilization find very little occurring.

--John Waller

---

#### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Please contact these individuals if you would like additional information concerning articles in this issue:

Robert L. Fisher  
33 - 65 14th St.  
L.I.C. NY 11106  
212-488-3957

John Walker  
The Urban Institute  
2100 M St.  
Washington, DC 20037

Debbie Gotwalt  
Planning and Evaluation Div.  
State Crime Comm.  
3400 Peachtree Rd., N.E. #625  
Atlanta, GA 30326  
404-894-4410

## JUDICIAL ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICT EVALUATION

The Georgia General Assembly in 1976 passed the Judicial Administration bill, which divided the state into ten administrative districts and provided superior court judges in each district with the authority to institute a system of administration for courts of record. In cooperation with the passage of this act, the Georgia State Planning Agency (State Crime Commission) made a two-year funding commitment to assist in implementing the provisions and intent of the new law. The Judicial Council of Georgia/Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) agreed to be the recipient of federal grant support for initiating this endeavor. To fulfill the commitment, LEAA funding was provided for ten district court administrators, support personnel, office equipment and operating expenses.

When the project had operated for one year, an evaluation was initiated. The assessment was conducted by the SPA evaluation unit under the guidance of the Evaluation Committee of the State Crime Commission. The in-depth evaluation was executed during the last quarter of 1977 and upon completion a final report was prepared and submitted to the Evaluation Committee. After minor revisions, the document was approved and readied for distribution. This article highlights the results obtained in assessing the statewide district court administration project in Georgia.

Realizing that a well developed methodology is crucial to conducting any credible project evaluation the strategy for assessing district court administration was carefully and deliberately designed. In preparing the approach, extraneous factors and intervening variables were considered. These included:

1. extreme fragmentation of the functions within the state's judicial system;
2. district court administration would initially impact more on the superior courts than any others;
3. the project needed to be evaluated from a perspective that considered other developments that had taken place in the judicial system; and
4. the evaluation would be partially premised on data that though reliable for some purposes might be questionable for others.

Recognizing these constraints and keeping in mind the purpose of the evaluation (to gauge the general utility and effectiveness of the project) it was determined that three specific questions should be addressed.

1. To what extent was the project conducted in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the Judicial Administration Act of 1976?
2. To what degree did the project meet the goals and objectives stated in the grant under which LEAA funds were allocated and what was the project's impact upon the courts during its first year of operation?
3. What was the value of the project in terms of cost and benefit to the judicial system?

Answering these questions required analysis of several factors: the roles of those agencies responsible for administering the grant, the structure of the district court administration system, the dynamics of the total system prior to district court administration and the performance of the project during its initial year of operation.

Three specific data collection instruments were developed: 1) a fact questionnaire administered by means of personal interviews to administrative judges and district court administrators, 2) a second fact questionnaire mailed to other court officials working within districts that had implemented the project; and 3) an "attitude survey" designed to test the attitudes and perceptions of all persons surveyed/interviewed toward the court system, structure and the ideal mode of operations.

The Fact questionnaires were designed to solicit information about the kinds of tasks the district administrators have performed, the types of courts with which they have worked, and the geographic extent of their activities. This information was particularly sought in the fact questionnaire administered to the administrative judges and court administrators.

The fact questionnaire administered to other court officials was intended to inquire into the nature and extent of the duties carried on by the district administrator including the amount of the administrators exposure to court officials within each district. Exposure was gauged by the degree to which court officials were aware of the project and its purposes, including contacts and discussions with the administrator about court administrative matters.

A third questionnaire, the attitude survey was administered to all persons from whom information was sought. A number of factors prompted the development of this survey. When developing the questionnaires the evaluation staff decided that questions asking for value judgements should be clearly identified. All such questions were placed in the attitude survey.

Of the questionnaires sent through the mail, 45.5% were returned completed. In some instances persons receiving surveys even responded with written letters expounding upon the information provided on the questionnaire forms.

Upon completion of the research on the system and analysis of the results of the data collection effort, the following findings were made with regard to the three major questions addressed by the evaluation:

1. TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THE PROJECT CONDUCTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT OF THE JUDICIAL ADMINISTRATION ACT OF 1976?

The Judicial Administration Act is loosely structured. It leaves administrative judges and the district councils substantial discretion as to the manner in which district court administration operates. In short, the judges are empowered to create a meaningful system of district administration or to act otherwise. They may choose to implement a system in which the district administrator is a contributor to the administration and management of the courts or they may implement a system that blunts and thwarts the administrator's potential. Staff found districts in which the administrator has a meaningful role and others where the project has little activity and/or potential.

2. TO WHAT DEGREE DID THE PROJECT MEET THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES STATED IN THE GRANT UNDER WHICH LEAA FUNDS WERE ALLOCATED AND WHAT WAS THE PROJECT'S IMPACT UPON THE COURTS DURING ITS FIRST YEAR OF OPERATION?

In its first year of operation the project failed to achieve completely the objectives set forth in the grant. However, a beginning was accomplished and some movement toward goal attainment was made. The results of the fact questionnaire and the interviews demonstrated that the initial year of operation provided activities that positively impacted upon the management and administration of superior courts. This excludes impact on caseloads, where it was found that little, if any, effect was felt.

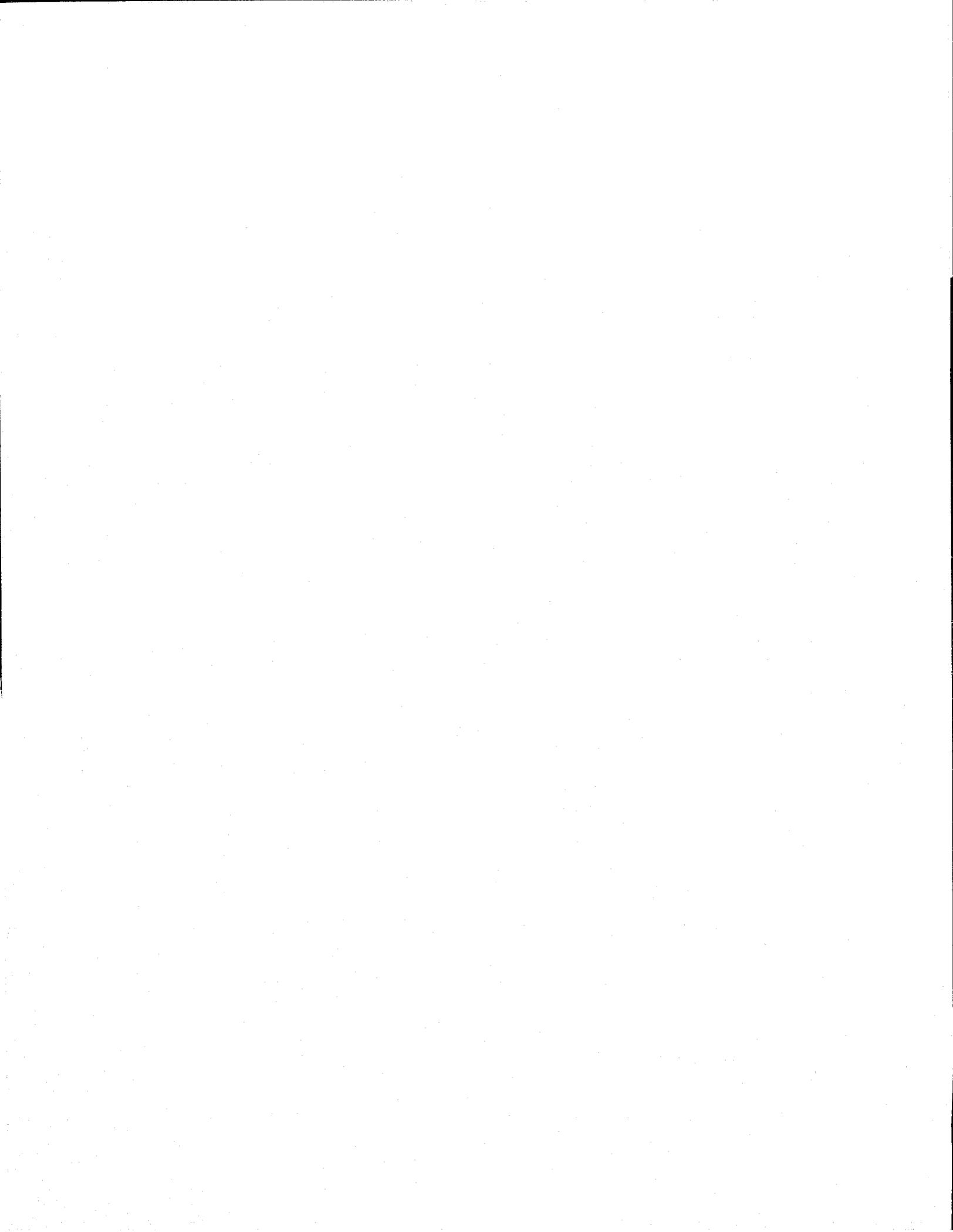
3. WHAT WAS THE VALUE OF THE PROJECT IN TERMS OF COST AND BENEFIT TO THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM?

In determining the cost benefit of the project, it was found that the investment enabled the state to maintain a structure that has significant potential for court administration and management. However, the actual benefit must be determined by the superior court judges and those who supervise the activities of the administrators. The first year is viewed as a time of learning for the administrators and administrative judges. Many of the projects potential benefits remain undeveloped and for the project to yield this potential and justify the yearly cost, the initiatives begun during the first year must be continued and extended. Also, superior court judges must accept and support this project. If support is given, then benefits will exceed investments; without support the project cannot succeed.

The SPA's evaluation staff believes that the first year was a good beginning for the project. However, participation and acceptance of the project in all ten administrative districts, coupled with a more rapid employment rate for the ten administrators would have significantly improved the project's first year impact. Greater managerial and administrative independence for the administrators would also have brought many more substantive first year accomplishments.

--Debbie Gotwalt

Copies of the report are available from the Evaluation Unit, Georgia State Crime Commission, 3400 Peachtree Road, N. E., Suite 625, Atlanta, Georgia 30326 FREE



**END**