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**AN EVALUATION OF PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY'S
CRIMINAL JUSTICE EVALUATION UNIT:**

A Summary Report

OFFICE OF BUDGET AND PROGRAMMING

JANUARY, 1978

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ACQUISITIONS

EVALUATION OF THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

CRIMINAL JUSTICE EVALUATION UNIT:

A Summary Report

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Prepared for

THE MARYLAND GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON
LAW ENFORCEMENT AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

JANUARY 1978

The primary focus of this evaluation study is an examination of the operational processes of the Prince George's County, Maryland Criminal Justice Evaluation Unit (CJEU). The author's intent is to highlight those CJEU activities which are associated with the four objectives specified in the Unit's third-year LEAA grant application and, through the data analysis, reveal the perceptions of the study sample toward CJEU operational processes and other interactional dynamics occurring between the Unit and its clients. It is hoped that, from this study, the readership will acquire a greater understanding of a linkage model that stresses the involvement of a County-university-based evaluation unit in the ongoing operations of criminal justice agencies.

The CJEU evaluation study was performed between June 1976 and June 1977. Data were collected from a variety of sources to determine whether the CJEU objectives specified in the grant application were accomplished. Information was obtained from Prince George's and Montgomery Counties' planners, the CJEU director and student research interns and 60 decision makers who function in the LEAA delivery system, the Prince George's County government, and twelve County criminal justice agencies. Data collection methods included informal interviews, structured interviews and questionnaires. The results of an analysis of these data are summarized below according to each CJEU objective.

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS

Objective One: To increase the amount and quality of evaluation products that are available for review by County government officials, County criminal justice decision makers and personnel in the LEAA delivery system.

The results pertaining to this objective revealed the following information. The CJEU conducted 15 evaluation projects between 1974 and 1976. Only two evaluation projects were performed in the county prior to the creation of the CJEU, between 1972 and 1974. CJEU evaluation productivity remained significantly higher from 1974 to 1976 in light of the fact that in Montgomery County, Maryland, for the same period, no program evaluations similar to those performed by the CJEU were conducted in any criminal justice agency.

An examination of the quality of CJEU evaluation products yielded the following. Most of the study sample (60 decision makers) were satisfied with the quality of CJEU products; over 75 percent of the responding decision makers felt that the findings from those evaluation projects were useful to themselves and/or their agencies. The majority of the respondents accepted various recommendations stemming from process evaluation projects. Reasons why 25 percent of the decision makers did not accept any evaluation project recommendations ranged from a belief that the recommendations could not have been used by their agencies to criticism of the recommendations for various undefined reasons.

Objective Two: To increase the amount of nonpaid technical assistance provided to decision makers at the Region IV Planning Board, the Governor's Commission, the County government and County criminal justice agency personnel.

This objective dealt with the nonpaid technical assistance that was provided to the County by the CJEU student research interns. Between 1974 and 1976, 28 student research interns were involved in 13 process evaluation projects, an estimated total financial savings to the County of \$34,775 (which also included the use of the University of Maryland computer facilities). A review of the available record data indicated that, prior to 1974, no nonpaid technical assistance was provided to County criminal justice agencies in the form of student research interns.

Objective Three: To increase the understanding, legitimacy, and potential use of process evaluation results.

The findings from the data analyses relating to this objective indicated the following: The majority of the study sample, 75 percent, responded favorably to two indicators that measured the extent to which they perceived process evaluation results were derived from valid scientific procedures (this concept was labeled "legitimacy").

Next, the data analysis focused on the amount and nature of exposure the study sample had to the evaluation projects produced by the CJEU between 1974 and 1976 (potential use of process evaluation results). Over two-thirds of the study participants stated that they had been briefed by either CJEU staff, student research interns or personnel from their agency concerning evaluation project findings and recommendations. Slightly more than half of the study sample had discussed one or more evaluation projects with persons inside or outside their agency. Sixty percent of the decision makers read one or more CJEU evaluation project reports and had previously been involved in some aspect of a CJEU process evaluation project.

The inquiry into the amount of decision maker active support for process evaluation procedures indicated that a majority of the study participants supported them. More of the decision makers advocated or thought about using process evaluation findings than actually presented them as examples of the type of evaluation to be used in the future. Furthermore, a combination of several exposures to process evaluation rather than an isolated exposure was most important as to whether or not the study sample actively supported process evaluation procedures.

A large portion of this evaluation study was designed to probe the extent to which the study participants utilized process evaluation project products. The findings indicated that 55 percent of the decision makers either used or suggested that others use process evaluation findings that pertained to their agencies. Decision makers used process evaluation results in four primary ways: for funding and program modification purposes, justifying the current direction of their programs, and/or implementing specific plans for their programs. In reference to the funding of new or existing programs, process evaluation demonstrated some utility as a means for securing these funds. Of significance to whether or not decision makers used CJEU products was (1) being briefed about evaluation projects and (2) being exposed to a combination of other CJEU activities excluding being briefed about CJEU evaluation projects.

Objective Four: To increase the credibility of the CJEU.

The final area of inquiry focused on the decision makers' perceptions concerning CJEU credibility as a research unit. The index of this concept revealed that a large majority of the decision makers believed the CJEU possessed a high degree of credibility. In general, CJEU credibility was largely viewed as being associated with (1) the extent to which the CJEU openly communicated its operational progress to decision makers and (2) the control its director exercised in developing within its student research interns a sense of professional responsibility for the work they performed within County criminal justice agencies.

CJEU EVALUATION STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the present evaluation study are intended to be used in three primary ways: to support the existing direction of the CJEU, to suggest CJEU operational modifications or developments, or to indicate a need for future research. The following recommendations stem from specific results obtained from the process evaluation of the CJEU and are enumerated for each of the objectives specified in the CJEU grant application.

Objective One

A. During the two years prior to the creation of the CJEU two Criminal Justice program evaluation studies were conducted in the County. Between 1974 and 1976 the CJEU performed fifteen evaluation projects, a substantial increase over previous years. Federal, state, and local funding sources continue to express the importance of evaluation research in the field of criminal justice, which reinforces the need for the CJEU to pursue its present level of evaluation activity.

B. The evaluation findings indicate that the study sample believes the overall quality of CJEU evaluations is good. The problem, however, stems from the fifteen percent of the study sample that do not feel CJEU process evaluation products are useful and the twenty percent that fail to accept any recommendations from CJEU evaluation projects. Two suggestions are offered in an attempt to resolve this problem:

- * Future research needs to be undertaken in order to probe more fully the reasons why certain decision makers do not feel evaluation results are useful and why others fail to accept any evaluation recommendations. Further, at that time, their perceptions of how to improve the quality of CJEU evaluations may be solicited.
- * The CJEU may develop more pragmatic recommendations if they explain the results of the data analysis to agency decision makers prior to completing a final report. In this way, CJEU staff can devise recommendations with the aid of decision maker input, increasing the likelihood of their use.

Objective Two

Currently, the student research intern component of the CJEU provides the County with a substantial financial savings. Prior to 1974 nonpaid technical assistance to County criminal justice agencies was nonexistent. Between 1974 and 1976, 28 student research interns completed 13 process evaluation projects using University of Maryland computers at a projected savings of \$34,775. Without the output from the student research interns, the scope of CJEU activities would be necessarily curtailed. When viewed in this light, it remains advantageous for the County to retain the services of the student research intern component of the CJEU.

Objectives Three and Four

The results from our evaluation indicate that approximately 75% of the study sample believe that CJEU evaluation products are the result of legitimate evaluation procedures. In viewing the indicators measuring legitimacy, 25% do not perceive CJEU evaluation products as scientific and 22% lack confidence in the manner in which process evaluation products are developed. Therefore, future research is needed in order to uncover why these decision makers have responded negatively to the above indicators. A portion of this research should examine the reasons why the greater majority of the sample believes that process evaluation results are legitimately developed. This, in turn, may lead to the modification of CJEU operational processes that will ultimately increase the legitimacy of CJEU evaluation products beyond the 75th percentile.

Decision maker exposure to a combination of process evaluation activities is the major factor affecting their support of process evaluation procedures. Individual activities alone are not significant contributors toward this end. Thus, the following is recommended:

- * Future data analysis should be undertaken in order to discover which combination of process evaluation exposures has the greater impact upon decision maker support of process evaluation procedures.

The data analysis showed that keeping decision makers informed of work accomplished on evaluation projects was significant in increasing CJEU credibility. Consequently, it is recommended that the CJEU continue both its policy of advising decision makers on each phase of an evaluation project and soliciting their input concerning the evaluation methodology for possible use in the evaluation study.

The credibility of the Unit increases when decision makers believe that process evaluation is not merely a collection of useless statistics. To this end the CJEU should provide decision makers with a detailed explanation of the statistical procedures used to analyze the data. This includes what the procedures are, how they are to be used, and what they are intended to show when applied to the data. If decision makers are to have confidence in the recommendations stemming from the evaluation projects, they must first understand and develop a sense of confidence in the statistical procedures that are used to develop those recommendations. In addition, the CJEU must concentrate on creating recommendations that are both feasible to implement and compatible with the operational policies of the agency in which the evaluation is performed.

- * When the problem of decision maker exposure to process evaluation has been resolved, the CJEU should implement a program aimed at involving decision makers in those types of exposures that will lead to their increased support of process evaluation procedures.

The findings indicate that briefing decision makers about CJEU evaluation projects is a significant activity in determining whether or not an agency uses process evaluation results. Therefore, it is suggested that the CJEU staff and/or student research interns continue to make every effort to brief agency decision makers on evaluation projects, up to and including the delivery of the final reports. At the present time, the CJEU delivers an oral presentation to selected decision makers within an agency where a process evaluation has been conducted. However, owing to its importance, re-emphasizing the need to brief decision makers should not be overlooked.

With the exception of being briefed about an evaluation project, a combination of other exposures to process evaluation is of primary importance in affecting the level of use of evaluation results by decision makers. Recommendations pertaining to increasing the effectiveness of this process and its relationship to any increase in use of evaluation results are identical with those specified above dealing with decision maker support of process evaluation procedures.

It was found that student research intern sincerity and initiative were important considerations of CJEU credibility. Student research interns should thus be expected to approach their work within criminal justice agencies in a serious and professional manner and not as merely a part of an academic exercise.

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