



BJA Bureau of Justice Assistance Bulletin

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Key Elements of Successful Adjudication Partnerships

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Local and state criminal justice systems are under constant pressure to operate more efficiently and effectively without diminishing the quality of their services. Criminal justice professionals face complex problems which impact more than one agency, and consequently the problems cannot be resolved easily by a single agency. Additionally, creating a cooperative partnership with independent agencies that function in a normally adversarial system such as the adjudication process can be a difficult task for many jurisdictions.

Notwithstanding fundamental obstacles, adjudication partnerships are proliferating in jurisdictions throughout the United States as criminal justice professionals seek new and more effective solutions to complex problems such as backlogged dockets, crowded jails, and recidivism of drug-addicted offenders. Collaborative efforts that involve the key participants of prosecutor, public defender, and court in the adjudication process are important for mounting an effective response to the problems.

Recognizing the need for practical information on adjudication partnerships that would enable jurisdictions to learn from the experiences of their counterparts, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) provided funding to the American Prosecutors Research Institute

(APRI) for a cooperative effort with the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and the National Legal Aid and Defender Association (NLADA) to research and document existing partnerships.

This bulletin provides general information about adjudication partnerships and describes critical elements that lead to successful partnerships, as observed in a variety of partnerships operating in jurisdictions across the country.

What Is an Adjudication Partnership?

An adjudication partnership is a formal or informal collaborative effort in which representatives from key justice system agencies join together in multiagency task forces, steering committees, or planning groups to:

- Identify problems.
- Develop goals and strategies for addressing the problems.
- Oversee implementation plans to manage or solve the problems.

Ideally the membership of an adjudication partnership will include representatives from the three primary players in the adjudication process: the prosecution, the defense, and the court. Also important is the participation of other agencies (such as law

enforcement and corrections) that would be involved and play critical roles in the resolution of the issue under consideration.

The term adjudication partnership serves as an umbrella concept under which many interagency efforts can be classified. The concept is not new; examples can be found in criminal justice coordinating committees, drug courts, expedited case management programs, and community justice programs.

Adjudication partnerships may be formed for a variety of reasons, including to address a specific problem in the justice system (for example, to develop a much-needed pretrial diversion program) or to form permanent interagency councils or oversight committees that meet regularly to discuss issues or problems. While partnerships may be formed for specific purposes, many evolve into permanent criminal justice committees or councils when participants discover the benefits of agencies communicating and solving problems together.

Most adjudication partnerships have been created through grassroots efforts by local criminal justice leaders who are committed to improving the operation and effectiveness of local criminal justice systems.

Characteristics of Successful Adjudication Partnerships

Criminal justice leaders in many jurisdictions have been successful in bringing together key players to tackle difficult problems. Although formed for a variety of reasons, these partnerships share several characteristics that participants report are critical to a successful partnership. The seven elements considered essential to establishing a successful partnership are leadership, membership, goals, team approach, long-term view, research and evaluation, and broad support.

Leadership

Key individuals in the justice system must provide leadership to give direction to the adjudication partnership. Forming a partnership in the normally adversarial environment of adjudication requires leadership, especially during times of change or crisis. Leaders from one or more key agencies must step forward to assemble a team of

key leaders and managers from other criminal justice agencies that are concerned about the particular issues facing the jurisdiction.

Leaders have emerged from all criminal justice components, depending upon the problem being addressed and the individual characteristics of the jurisdiction.

The Intermediate Sanctions Task Force in Dakota County, Hastings, Minnesota, was initiated in 1991 after a newly appointed director of community corrections engaged other criminal justice professionals in the problem-solving process that ended a history of distrust and dissension among criminal justice professionals in the county.

A leader must possess certain skills and be willing to take on specific responsibilities, such as clearly identifying problems and helping group members to envision how the local justice system will tackle the problems, convincing other key people of the value of working on the problem and of sharing a vision for its resolution, and working to create partnerships among members to achieve the envisioned change. A leader must also be able to motivate and inspire people into committing their time and efforts to projects and also investing in participating as equals around a committee table in spite of real or perceived differences in power or status among the members.

In this bulletin, the core leadership group is referred to as the steering committee.

Membership

The membership of the adjudication partnership should be broad based and should include a critical mass of key leaders who are truly committed to its goals and strategies. Broad-based representation helps to ensure that every agency that will be affected by changes initiated by the partnership has an opportunity to offer valuable insights regarding any plan for achieving program or project goals. This strategy also helps to prevent situations in which agencies that are not included in the planning process, or that do not agree with the partnership's mission, goals, or strategies, might scuttle a program or delay its implementation.

The original members of the partnership to establish the Juvenile Drug Treatment Court in Santa Clara County, San Jose, California, included a presiding judge of juvenile court, a deputy district attorney, a deputy public defender, a county executive, three juvenile probation representatives, an assessment counselor, and two representatives of the Department of Drug and Alcohol Services. As the group progressed in developing the program, additional agencies and services were added as critical to the effort (such as law enforcement, mental health treatment, and community outreach personnel).

If the three key participants—court, prosecutor, and defense—are included in the membership, the diversity of perspectives and experiences will make the identification of achievable goals more likely and increase the momentum toward their attainment. In addition to broadly based membership, a critical mass of key members on the steering committee must be truly committed to the goals and strategies and possess a willingness to expend time and energy to achieve them. Finally, steering committees must strive to maintain substantial continuity among their members as changes in designated participants can be disruptive.

Membership in the Intermediate Sanctions Policy Group in the Sixth Judicial District, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, has remained virtually unchanged since its creation in 1994. The continuity of membership has resulted in streamlined communication and greater mutual trust.

Goals

The adjudication partnership’s goals must be clear, useful, and achievable. A primary role of leadership in an adjudication partnership is to establish the objectives of the partnership. Members will “buy in” or commit to the partnership if the goals are clearly understood, determined to be useful to

participants, and considered to be achievable within a certain timeframe. The steering committee, therefore, must set both short- and long-term goals, establish priorities, and determine realistic timelines for resolving partnership issues.

In response to the court’s caseload crisis, the Early Felony Disposition Program (also known as LA Fast) in the Central District of Los Angeles County, California, was established through the leadership of a superior court judge and a municipal court judge. The program had the specific objective of significantly reducing the backlog of superior court trials by expediting the disposition of less serious, nonviolent, first-time felony offenders in the municipal court. LA Fast worked with the district attorney, the public defender, and probation officers to establish procedures that resulted in adjudication of such cases within 3 days of arraignment.

Team Approach

The steering committee must employ a team approach in the decisionmaking and planning processes. Regular and organized steering committee meetings to share information and ideas and discuss problems and plans are essential to maintaining partnership momentum.

All decisions are made by consensus at regular monthly meetings at the Intermediate Sanctions Policy Group in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Meetings should be open, frank, and civil. Exhibiting civility and respect for others is important for fostering mutual cooperation and helping steering committee members understand the problems and needs of each participating agency.

Steering committee meetings should seek consensus from all members on each goal, plan, and strategy. Members must be flexible, willing to consider compromise, and receptive to new ideas. Finally, steering committee members should define the roles and

responsibilities of each participating agency and member to ensure overall committee accountability.

Long-Term View

Steering committee members in an adjudication partnership must maintain a long-term view. Developing, implementing, and maintaining mutually agreeable strategies to address problems in the adjudication process usually requires considerable time, patience, and persistence. Therefore, participants must take a long-term view about the process and recognize the complexity of partnership goals and strategies, so they can develop realistic timeframes for accomplishing them.

Research and Evaluation

The adjudication partnership steering committee should use research and information on best practices to guide program development and use objective data to monitor and evaluate its programs. Successful adjudication partnership teams learn from the successes of others. Research on effective programs that have been used in other jurisdictions can provide details on particular strategies that can be adapted to local conditions, thereby saving steering committees much time and effort in designing programs.

The core team that worked to establish the Drug Court in Erie County, Buffalo, New York, studied the experiences of other jurisdictions and obtained additional support and guidance from a statewide organization that fostered information sharing among drug courts in New York.

In addition, systematically gathering data to monitor and evaluate progress toward the adjudication partnership's goals is critical for success. Ongoing monitoring of the program with relevant data can also alert the steering committee to the need for mid-course adjustments. Evaluation of program effectiveness will provide partnership members with specific information needed to justify continuation of a successful program over other alternatives.

The Jail Utilization Systems Team (JUST) team members in Monroe County, New York, meet monthly to discuss local criminal justice issues and jail population levels. The program regularly collects data to monitor and evaluate its performance on numerous measures of jail population and implementation of both release and sentencing alternatives for nonviolent offenders.

The steering committee is accountable for its expenditure of time and public resources, so it should be able to provide systematic data on its efforts to legislative or citizen groups when necessary.

Broad Support

The adjudication partnership team should seek criminal justice system and community support. Membership of an adjudication partnership steering committee must have an appropriately broad base at an early stage to engage the support of local key criminal justice players. Community support for the program is absolutely essential for moving forward or sustaining the strategy. The partnership team should provide information about the adjudication partnership to the community and seek community input on identifying and addressing problems.

The Willamette Criminal Justice Council in Benton County, Corvallis, Oregon, was started by the district attorney in 1992 and became a formal entity a year later when representatives of the Benton County government (district attorney, a judge, a court administrator, and public defender), representatives from four neighboring cities, and a local university signed an intergovernmental agreement outlining the purposes of the council which were to promote and facilitate fair, efficient, and coordinated criminal justice services. All original partners continue their active membership and also contribute to the annual budget of the council.

Successful Adjudication Partnerships

Through a national mail survey, 103 well-established adjudication partnerships were identified. Of these, eight were selected by APRI, NCSC, and NLADA for more intensive study, including site visits. Each partnership exhibits the critical components of successful partnerships. Descriptions of these adjudication partnerships and their accomplishments are provided in this section.

Drug Court, Erie County, Buffalo, New York

With the support of the Erie County Alternatives to Incarceration Board, a city court judge (who is also a former prosecutor) worked with the director of the Court OutReach and Treatment Services (COURTS) program on a concept to develop a drug court. The judge and the COURTS director called upon officials from the mayor's office, treatment providers, representatives from the prosecutor's office, and the public defender during the planning process for the Buffalo and Erie County Drug Court (BDC). The primary goal of BDC was the development, implementation, and operation of a drug court to address the increasing number of drug offenders entering the system.

Early evaluation results of the BDC indicate that the BDC partners have been successful in their efforts. More than 250 drug offenders participated in the program during its first year. At the time of the evaluation, 50 clients had successfully completed the program and 180 remained active. Treatment attendance rates are reported to be high (78 percent), and graduated sanctions are consistently applied for non-compliance. Less than 10 percent of the offenders have failed in the program and have been transferred to the criminal justice system.

In addition to the early indications of program effectiveness, BDC has also been successful in obtaining funding for treatment services for drug court clients, resulting in an expansion of communitywide treatment alternatives. BDC also has increased links among program planners, which has resulted in more training opportunities for treatment professionals.

For more information, contact: The Honorable Robert T. Russell, Jr., Presiding Judge, 50 Delaware Avenue, Suite 200, Buffalo, NY 14202.

Early Felony Disposition Program, Central District, Los Angeles County, California

In response to an increase in the felony caseload, a judge from the superior court and a judge from the municipal court in the Central District of Los Angeles County initiated this adjudication partnership. An informal partnership, the Early Felony Disposition Program (also known as LA Fast) was developed to expedite the disposition of less serious, nonviolent, first-time felony offenders in the municipal court. Working with the district attorney, the public defender, the sheriff, and representatives from pretrial services and the probation department, the judges met regularly to review the court's research on offenders and the trial calendar backlog to consider options in developing the program.

The program was implemented in one municipal courtroom. Initially the program included first-time drug possession offenders but has been expanded to include welfare fraud and escape cases. The expedited procedures result in a unique accomplishment—the adjudication of these cases within 3 days of arraignment. Since the program's implementation, it has consistently removed between 300 and 500 felony cases per month from the stream of cases that would normally go to the superior court. Because of its success, similar early disposition programs have been established in several other municipal courts in Los Angeles County.

For more information, contact: The Honorable Veronica McBeth, Presiding Judge, Los Angeles Municipal Court, 110 North Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90012-3055.

Intermediate Sanctions Policy Group, Sixth Judicial District, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

In 1994, the director of the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) joined with the district court judge and a legislator to form the Intermediate Sanctions (IS) Policy Group to collaborate on the expansion of alternative sanctions as sentencing options. Representatives from key criminal justice agencies that would be affected by the creation of a continuum of sanctions met to set common goals and develop an implementation plan for the group. The IS Policy Group, which includes representatives from the

courts, prosecutor's office, public defender's office, law enforcement agencies, and juvenile probation office, believes that whenever one part of the system acts in isolation, the effectiveness and the efficiency of the entire system are adversely affected.

Through the commitment of group members, the operation of the courts has changed significantly. The group's accomplishments include reducing the delay for probation revocation cases (the time to dispose of such cases has been reduced from 3 months to 10 or 14 days) and setting aside one afternoon each week to hear driving under suspension (DUS) cases, which account for nearly 20 percent of the associate court docket. The group has conducted a study of DUS cases to develop a profile of DUS offenders and to determine the most effective solutions. The results of the study will be used to guide the state legislature on how to address this issue.

Other accomplishments include addressing the problem of supervising the increasing misdemeanor population by implementing a "self-supervision" probation alternative, which would not require formal oversight by DCS, and developing and endorsing a continuum of sanctions. The IS Policy Group continues to meet regularly to collaborate on emerging issues.

For more information, contact: Jean Kuehl, Assistant Director, DCS, 951 29th Avenue SW., Cedar Rapids, IA 52404.

Intermediate Sanctions Task Force, Dakota County, Hastings, Minnesota

Following a history of conflict and friction among justice professionals in Dakota County, the appointment of a new director of the Community Corrections (CC) program in 1991 created an opportunity for criminal justice organizations to work together to improve services. The cooperative effort of a former presiding judge, a member of the Board of Commissioners (BOC), and the CC director resulted in the establishment of the Intermediate Sanctions Task Force (ISTF), which brought together representatives from the court, county attorney's office, public defender's office, sheriff's department, CC staff, BOC staff, and local police to develop a consensus on

how local justice problems should be solved. The primary goal was to establish a mechanism for developing consensus and bringing key leaders together to discuss their differences and address problems in a cooperative manner.

Participants report that the most important outcome of this effort was that the ISTF process became a "permanent fixture" in the criminal justice community. Task force members are now committed to cooperation and communication, rather than conflict, for dealing with criminal justice issues. One interviewee noted that ISTF has become an independent seat of authority in the county justice system—if an agency expects to introduce significant procedural changes that might affect other agencies, it must bring these procedures to ISTF first.

Other ISTF accomplishments include a reduction in weekend jail overcrowding, increased use of electronic home monitoring, creation of a probation service center and two child safety centers, and increased use of a continuum of sentences. ISTF continues to plan and implement innovative and collaborative efforts to achieve its goals in the areas of sentencing and probation.

For more information, contact: Mark Carey, CC Director, Judicial Center, 1560 West Highway 55, Hastings, MN 55033.

Jail Utilization Systems Team, Monroe County, Rochester, New York

In 1992, after the county executive required all Monroe County department heads to attend quality management training, these managers began working together to solve problems in the county. As a result, local criminal justice system officials formed a public safety sector team, which included judges, the public defender, the district attorney, the sheriff, the directors of public safety and probation, and representatives of related agencies (pretrial services, the Rochester Police Department, the county law enforcement council, the defense bar, and the local magistrates association). The Jail Utilization Systems Team (JUST) set as its highest priority the alleviation of jail overcrowding and developed a three-pronged approach to address the problem: an early screening

process for first-time, nonviolent offenders by a senior district attorney who recommends cases for early disposition (pre-grand jury); a multifaceted effort to develop and enhance an array of graduated restrictions for out-of-custody defendants awaiting trial and graduated sanctions for convicted misdemeanants; and the development and implementation of an integrated justice information system.

Team accomplishments include significant reductions in case processing time and average length of time in jail for nonviolent offenders and dissemination of an annual report on successful innovations. In addition, JUST reported savings of 162 jail beds per day in 1996, 208 jail beds per day in 1997, and an estimated 2-year net cost avoidance of more than \$5 million. Team members believe that one of their most important accomplishments is that now top people from key agencies meet regularly, and these discussions have improved the operation of the criminal justice system.

For more information, contact: Thomas Gibson, ATI Program Manager, Monroe County Department of Public Safety, City Place, Suite 2100, 33 North Fitzhugh Street, Rochester, NY 14614.

Juvenile Drug Treatment Court, Santa Clara County, San Jose, California

The presiding judge of the juvenile court in Santa Clara County contacted representatives from other criminal justice agencies to address the growing juvenile crime problem in the county and discuss the idea of a juvenile treatment program. Using an adult treatment court model that the judge learned about at a drug/alcohol seminar, the partnership planned and developed the Juvenile Drug Treatment Court over a 1-year period. The special court began operation in 1996.

The program provides alcohol and drug treatment services to juvenile offenders. The success rate of the treatment was shown to be around 90 percent. The program has conducted three graduation exercises for youth who have completed the program and has started groups for alumni and parents of alumni.

Partnership members have continued discussing the program's progress and setbacks in individual cases.

The group has successfully expanded services to include inpatient drug treatment, 10 full-time mentors who are graduate or postgraduate students, and a mental health practitioner who assists in drug and alcohol evaluations. In addition, the local YMCA has become a member of the drug court team and has developed a program that includes training in life and job-seeking skills, as well as group counseling for teens and parents. Team members report that this program demonstrates what is possible when resources are marshaled and parents are involved.

For more information, contact: The Honorable Tom Edwards, Presiding Judge, Juvenile Court, 840 Guadeloupe Parkway, San Jose, CA 95110.

Juvenile Justice Restitution and Mediation Project, Wilmington, Delaware

In 1992, the Delaware Center for Justice, a nonprofit community group, initiated a pilot victim-offender mediation project in the family court. The program director negotiated the details of the project with the deputy attorney general in charge of juvenile cases and representatives from the family court, public defender's office, and probation services to develop a significant role for mediation in juvenile cases. Four principal steering committee members indicated that they were primarily interested in, and would support, a program that focused on improving enforcement of restitution in juvenile cases, which by consensus became the focal point of the Juvenile Justice Restitution and Mediation Project.

In 1996, the attorney general's office referred 1,295 cases to the program (of which 907 included orders for restitution and 388 included orders for victim-offender mediation). Data from the program indicate that more than 90 percent of juveniles who paid restitution through this program completed their restitution obligations. In addition, by taking over the supervision of juvenile cases that involve restitution, project staff have reduced the workload of the family court, juvenile probation officers, and the deputy attorney general's staff. Finally, because the program makes restitution a "front burner issue" in which juvenile offenders deal with the consequences of their behavior early in their supervision, victims receive restitution quickly and report more satisfaction.

For more information, contact: Mary Elizabeth Mical, Program Director, Victim Offender Mediation Program, Delaware Center for Justice, 501 Shipley Street, Wilmington, DE 19801.

Willamette Criminal Justice Council, Benton County, Corvallis, Oregon

In 1992, a consortium of concerned citizens, elected officials, and criminal justice service providers (representatives of the presiding judge, the Indigent Defense Consortium, the trial court, the court administrator, and others), led by the Benton County district attorney, organized the Willamette Criminal Justice Council (WCJC) to facilitate the efficiency and effectiveness of interagency communication among the criminal justice services in the county. Formalized by an intergovernmental agreement in 1993, WCJC adopted bylaws and began a strategic planning process to develop a mission, vision, short- and long-term goals, and a plan to implement high-priority projects. Since its institutionalization, the WCJC has continually reviewed the status of priority activities, identified new priorities, and updated its priorities. As a result of WCJC's efforts, the 1995 Oregon Legislative Assembly required all counties to appoint a local public safety coordinating council.

WCJC's accomplishments also include the creation of a citizens' committee appointed by city council members to provide an opportunity for community members to work with public officials on pressing issues, the development of a child abuse investigations protocol, the creation and implementation of an ongoing data systems integration project, the development of a victimization survey and juvenile justice crime prevention plan, and a growth in minority outreach efforts. Working through a partnership with 26 other counties, the group also led the development of a recently completed case management system for prosecutors that saved participating jurisdictions the cost of developing such a system.

For more information, contact: Stephanie Holmes, WCJC Coordinator, P.O. Box 686, Corvallis, OR 97321; World Wide Web: <http://www.cwcog.cog.or.us/wcjc/>.

Conclusion

Despite longstanding barriers to successful cooperation, the movement toward forming local and state partnerships to respond to criminal justice issues is growing. Leaders in many jurisdictions have learned how to successfully engage their criminal justice counterparts in the process of improving the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of justice. Given the range of issues currently being addressed, adjudication partnerships carry the potential to substantially change the adjudication process as it is known today.

Adjudication Partnerships Checklist for Success

1. Key individuals in the justice system must provide *leadership* to give direction to the adjudication partnership. These leader(s) must:
 - ___ Identify the current problem and articulate a vision for how the local justice system will tackle the problem.
 - ___ Convince other key people of the vision's value and viability so that it becomes a shared vision.
 - ___ Build coalitions (or partnerships) to achieve the envisioned change.
 - ___ Motivate and inspire people to commit their time and effort to the program.
2. *Membership* of the adjudication partnership steering committee should be *broad based* and include *a critical mass of key leaders* who are truly committed to the goals strategy. The partnership must:
 - ___ Identify and involve key players and stakeholders who will be critical to the success of the partnership.
 - ___ Include sufficient numbers of key leaders who are committed to the goals and strategies of the partnership to move projects forward.
 - ___ Maintain continuity among members to successfully achieve the shared vision of the partnership.
3. The adjudication partnership *goals* must be clear, useful, and achievable. The partnership steering committee must:
 - ___ Set specific short- and long-term goals.
 - ___ Define goals that are useful to partnership members and achievable within a prescribed timeframe.
 - ___ Establish priorities.
4. The decisionmaking and planning process employed by the steering committee must reflect *a team approach*. Partnership steering committee members must:
 - ___ Hold regular, well-planned meetings to maintain momentum.
 - ___ Conduct meetings that are open, frank, and civil, and foster respect and cooperation among members.
 - ___ Be flexible, willing to compromise to some extent, and open to new ideas.
 - ___ Seek consensus when making decisions regarding goals, plans, and strategies.
 - ___ Define roles and responsibilities of participating agencies and individual members to ensure accountability.
5. Steering committee members in an adjudication partnership must embrace a *long-term view*. Members must:
 - ___ Be patient and persistent because solutions to adjudication problems require time.
 - ___ Recognize the complexity of partnership goals and strategies and develop realistic timeframes for accomplishing them.
6. The adjudication partnership steering committee uses *research* and state-of-the-art practice to guide program development and *objective data* to monitor and evaluate its programs. The steering committee must:
 - ___ Review and analyze relevant information documenting successful programs and best practices to benefit from the experiences of others.
 - ___ Systematically gather data to evaluate the effectiveness of partnership programs and continually monitor results.
7. The adjudication partnership team seeks *broad criminal justice system and community support*. The partnership team must:
 - ___ Ensure the involvement of key criminal justice players to obtain criminal justice system support.
 - ___ Provide information about the criminal justice partnership to the community and seek community input on partnership programs.

For More Information

To obtain more information about adjudication partnerships, contact:

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U.S. Department of Justice Response Center

1-800-421-6770 or 202-307-1480

Response center staff are available Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. eastern time.

Resources

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