

The Bureau of Justice Assistance EVALUATION WEB SITE

The First Year: An Annual Report

BJA Evaluation Web Site



October 1999

Prepared by the Justice Research and Statistics Association

“The site is a godsend. I’m facilitating an Advancing Community Policing Grant from the Feds. It involves program evaluation and a strategic plan. A consultant was not written into the grant, so at the start I was a bit lost. I cannot emphasize how much you’ve reduced my stress level..., Given all the agencies you deal with, the material will reach everyone with the need to evaluate their programs. Thanks again.” -Police Lieutenant, Police Department in California

History of the BJA Evaluation Web Site

Throughout its existence the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) has worked to meet the special needs of the criminal justice community on the state and local levels. The State and Local Evaluation Program has been one of its most concentrated efforts. BJA established the state-based program with the goal of building federal, state, and local partnerships to assist in implementing the strategic planning, reporting, and evaluation requirements of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act, as amended by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988. BJA has fulfilled its responsibility to the partnership by providing mechanisms for bringing policy makers, planners, and practitioners together for information exchange and the development of reports and guidelines. It also has provided technical assistance and training to the state and local agencies responsible for developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating violent crime and anti-drug abuse programs under the Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance Program.

As a result of their partnership with BJA, many state and local criminal justice agencies have developed assessment and evaluation capabilities, such as documenting and monitoring programs, reporting on program activities, and conducting process and impact evaluations. However, the partnership also made clear how great the existing need for developing evaluation capacity in the states remained. To address that need for instructional evaluation materials tailored to the varying skill levels of state and local criminal justice program planners and managers, BJA turned to applications of the Internet and its potential for delivering a vast range of materials to a large number of users in a useful and cost-effective manner.

In 1997, BJA formed a cooperative agreement with the Justice Research and Statistics Association (JRSA) to create an evaluation Web site. A planning group of evaluation experts, state planners, and local program managers was appointed as an advisor by BJA to assist with the planning and development of the Web site. When concluded, the framework for the Web site included: (1) an “electronic roadmap for evaluation,” (2) evaluation resources, (3) frequently asked questions, (4) state and local evaluation reports, (5) a site map, (6) a glossary of evaluation terms, and (7) a means to contact BJA. With this framework, staff from BJS and JRSA began gathering the relevant materials and building the electronic structure of the Web site. On August 5, 1998, the BJA Evaluation Web Site came “on line” for use, and it has continued to expand its materials and links to other relevant sites in order to provide state and local evaluators the fullest range of resources for their efforts.

The Electronic Roadmap for Evaluation

The Electronic Roadmap for Evaluation provides a “geographic” tour of the evaluation enterprise. Beginning with an overview of why evaluation is done, the “map” takes the user through four “states” with increasing complexity of evaluation questions and techniques: (1) Introduction & Orientation, (2) Basic Fundamentals, (3) Beyond the Basics, and (4) Useful Resources for Evaluation. The latter “state” reprises the glossary, state and local reports, and important links to other sites found in other components of the Web site.

Each “state” features “cities” representing key topics in evaluation, such as “Planning for Evaluation,” “Performance Measures,” and “Impact Evaluation.” Clicking on a “city” will take the user to particular subtopics within that general topic. For example, visiting the “city” of “Process Evaluation,” the user will find “What Is Process Evaluation?” and “Research Designs for Process Evaluation” and a quick description of issues associated with those topics. Clicking on one of the subtopics will take the user to a brief summary of the subtopic and a bibliography of related government publications, the relevant portions of which can be accessed by clicking on the chosen publication. Also, within the brief summary of the subtopic, evaluation terms are noted in red, and definitions for them from the Web site glossary can be obtained by clicking on the term.

Use of the Electronic Roadmap will give the user the equivalent of a text with supporting articles and supplements at the touch of a mouse. It allows the user to pick and choose the topics to be covered and the order in which they will be addressed. It is specifically designed to allow the beginner to learn, the practitioner to review, and both to find materials for their particular needs.



Resources

The Resources section of the Web site directs users to a variety of other sources to assist their searches for evaluation information. One source is State Agency Contacts, providing for each state and territory the names, addresses, phone numbers, and, if available, e-mail addresses and fax numbers of the contacts in the State Administrative Agencies under the Byrne Drug and Violence Program and in the state Statistical Analysis Centers.

Another source is the Web site bibliography, listing by topic numerous books and articles on evaluation, including the government documents listed in the roadmap. Under another source, Publications of BJA Evaluation Reports, the user will find state reports of evaluations conducted on BJA-funded projects. The last source, Links to Evaluation Sites, directly links the user electronically to several other related Web sites, including other evaluation sites, criminal justice sites, and all the federal government criminal justice sites.



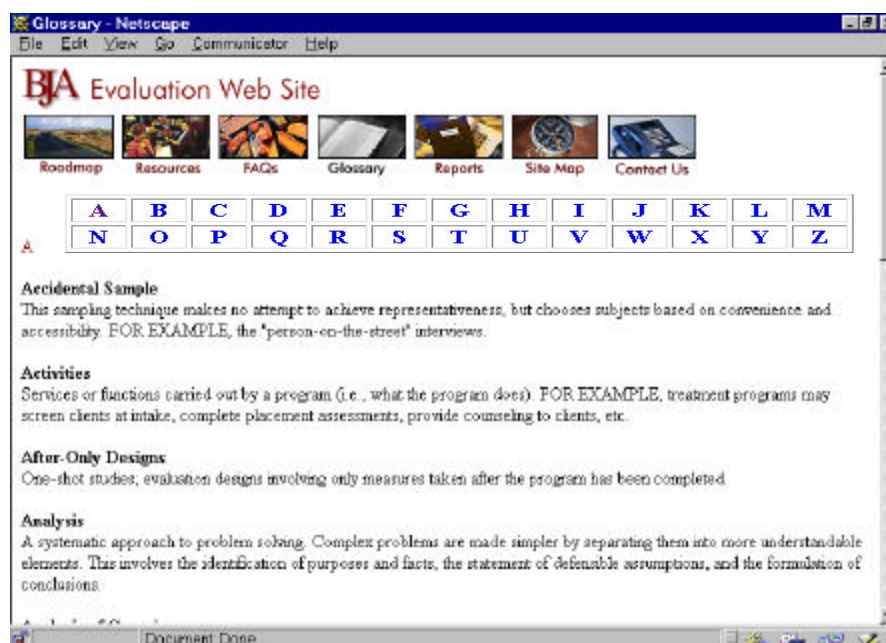
State and Local Reports

Under the State and Local Reports section, the user will find the most recent *State Annual Reports* as well as the two volumes of the series *State and Local Program: Focus on What Works*. In the latter, the user will be able to locate descriptions and evaluations of recent efforts in drug and violence programs, including reports on rural violence, innovative courts programs, and efforts with youths.



Glossary of Evaluation Terms

The Glossary features hundreds of terms commonly found in the evaluation literature. In this section not only are the terms defined but, where possible, specific examples related to criminal justice are provided. Thus, the user not only has a ready resource for understanding the specialized language of evaluation but also can see direct applications to criminal justice.



Other Components of the Web Site

Besides the components described above, the BJA Evaluation Web Site has three other useful elements. It contains a Frequently Asked Questions section with answers to questions about the Web site, evaluation, and BJA. It also contains a Site Map, an outline of all the elements of the Web site on one computer screen with each element linked to its location in the site for easy access. Finally, the user can use the Contact Us section of the site to ask questions that are directed to the appropriate personnel in BJA for quick and accurate answers.

The Future of the Web Site

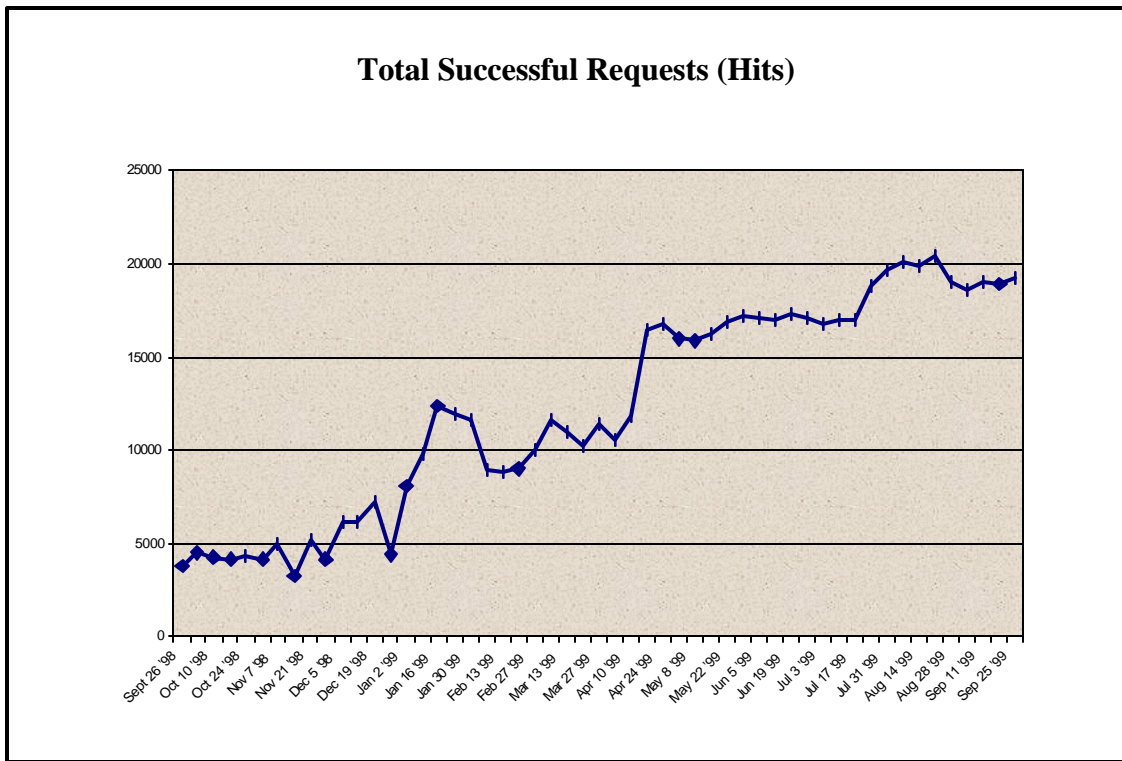
The BJA Evaluation Web Site is a product of the latest in Internet technology and will be kept up-to-date with advancements in the field in order to ensure the best service to the state and local practitioners and evaluators who have come to depend on it. The planning group continues to meet regularly to review and improve the site and to suggest means to update and enhance its capabilities. In the year that the Web site has existed, it has grown exponentially in its range and depth with the goal of meeting the information and technical needs of the state and local evaluation constituency.

Statistics on the Use of the BJA Evaluation Web Site During 1998-1999

Activity on the Site

The activity generated on the BJA Evaluation Web Site has increased fivefold in the course of the first year of operation. As Figure 1 shows, the number of “hits” (defined as “the total number of files requested by all users in a given period of time”) has risen from approximately 3,769 on September 26, 1998, to over 19,210 on September 25, 1999. Particularly large increases in use have occurred in each period immediately following presentation of the Web site at national conferences held by BJA in April 1999 and by the Office of Justice Programs in July 1999.

Figure 1



In July 1999, JRSA implemented software allowing more detailed analysis of the use of the Web site. In the period July 24, 1999, through August 25, 1999, for example, the number of actual user sessions for the entire period was 2,640, an average of 112 user sessions per day. Per weekday, the average number of user sessions was 121. Figure 2 shows the growth of user sessions through the period.

With the new data, it is now possible to determine particular patterns of usage. For example, the five most requested pages in the period were:

- (1) the BJA Evaluation Web Site home page
- (2) the Electronic Roadmap
- (3) the State and Local Reports
- (4) Resources
- (5) Frequently Asked Questions

The five pages on which users spent the most time, on average, were:

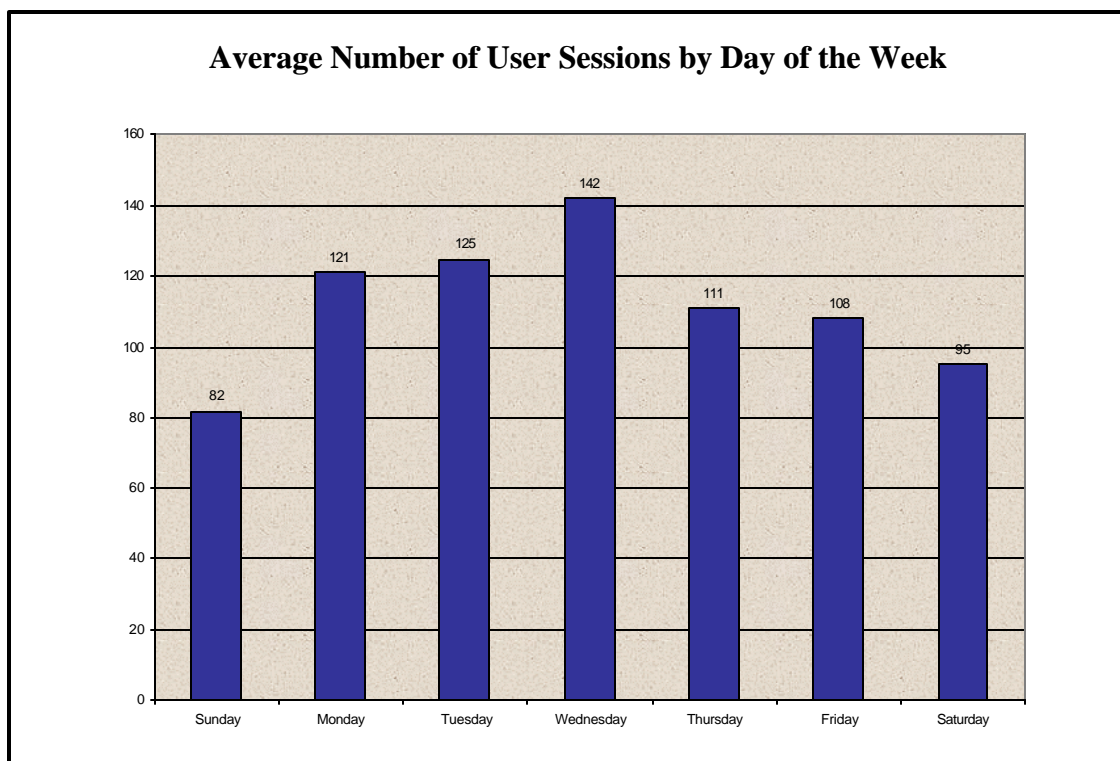
- (1) Other Links, under Resources (4:20 minutes)
- (2) Frequently Asked Questions (4:00 minutes)
- (3) Contact Us (2:50 minutes)
- (4) the Electronic Roadmap (1:40 minutes)
- (5) the Site Map (1:21 minutes)

The five “single access” pages, meaning that the pages are likely bookmarked, were:

- (1) the Evaluation Web Site home page
- (2) the Electronic Roadmap
- (3) the State and Local Reports
- (4) the State and Local Reports, State Annual Reports
- (5) Resources

As shown in figure 2, the most active day of use of the Web site, on average, in the period was Wednesday. The least active day, on average, was Sunday. The most active day was Monday, July 26, receiving 2,261 “hits,” directly after the conference at which the Web site was featured and promotional materials were distributed.

Figure 2



About the Users

To determine the specific types of users of the Web site, a user survey was conducted from August 30, 1999, through September 30, 1999, to provide the most recent snapshot of usage. The survey asked whether the user came from a criminal justice, academic, nonprofit, or other work setting, how often the user had visited the site, and where the user had learned of the site. Thirty-eight users responded. The results were as follows.

Twenty-seven (71.1%) of the users came from a criminal justice work setting. Of those in criminal justice, 2 (7.4%) were from a federal agency, 9 (33.3%) from a state agency, and 16 (59.3%) from a local agency. Three (7.9%) responding users worked in a non-criminal justice agency setting (2 on the state level, 1 on the local), and 5 (13.2%) worked in an academic setting (4 students, 1 instructor/researcher). One of the remaining users did not choose a work setting, while the remaining 2 users came from a nonprofit organization and from the Stockholm (Sweden) Police Academy, respectively.

Twenty-one (55.3%) of the users were first-time visitors, 10 (26.3%) responded that they visited 1-3 times a month, and 7 (18.4%) indicated that they visited 4 or more times per month. Fourteen (36.8%) responding users found the site through the BJA Web site and its link to the Evaluation Web Site. Twelve (31.6%) were directed to the site by a search engine, 6 (15.8%) by a report or publication, and 4 (10.5%) by materials obtained at conferences such as those mentioned earlier. The remaining 2 responding users (5.3%) found the site through the Stockholm Police Academy or the Web site for the Local Law Enforcement Block Grant.

From these statistics, it is clear that the BJA Evaluation Web Site reaches a broad spectrum of potential users. It is also clear that many users find the site valuable and return to it frequently. The means of promoting the Web site's usage appear varied and wide in scope as well. The intent of BJA to provide useful evaluation resources to a large, heterogeneous audience has been met to this point with its Evaluation Web Site.

Conclusion

The Bureau of Justice Assistance has consistently sought to provide the best information and technical assistance to state and local criminal justice agencies throughout its history. In a period in which evaluation has become more important for purposes of management and accountability of programs, BJA created programs specifically designed to enhance state and local evaluation capacities. An important part of that effort has been development of the BJA Evaluation Web Site. With an orientation to all levels of evaluators, from the beginner to the experienced practitioner, the BJA Evaluation Web Site has offered a wealth of materials and advice for effective program evaluation. Its commitment to building state and local evaluation capacity will ensure that BJA will continue to develop the BJA Evaluation Web Site to meet the needs of criminal justice planners and practitioners well into the 21st century.