

## Evaluating Multijurisdictional Drug Enforcement Task Forces

*NIJ Research in Progress Seminar, "The Evaluation of Multijurisdictional Task Forces," David Hayeslip and Malcolm Russell-Einhorn, grant number 99-DD-BX-0034, available on videotape from NCJRS (NCJ 191963).*

When local agencies band together to confront drug problems, the results outweigh what a single agency can do alone. Sounds like common sense. But to what extent do multiagency efforts work better than single-agency efforts? And are there tools for figuring out whether these multiagency efforts are worth the Federal funding that ranges from \$200 to \$360 million each year?

These questions were at the heart of a study of Byrne Program-funded multijurisdictional task forces (MJTF's) conducted by David Hayeslip, a former senior researcher at Abt Associates who is now a senior research associate at the Urban Institute, and Malcolm Russell-Einhorn, a former researcher at Abt Associates who is now the associate director of the University of Maryland's IRIS Center. (For more information, see "The Byrne Program," page 41.) These two researchers hoped to provide drug MJTF's with tools to conduct meaningful evaluations of their own effectiveness. Byrne Program State Administrative Agencies (SAA's), which usually allocate the funding to MJTF's, could also use such tools. Hayeslip and Russell-Einhorn discussed preliminary findings of their study and future plans at a Research in Progress seminar at NIJ.

### Initial Findings

The researchers found that data gathering at the local level is limited and data analysis is scant. Most of the data collected by task forces are for reporting to the SAA's the numbers of arrests and amounts of drugs seized. Fewer than a dozen studies

conducted over the past decade—all of them using outside researchers—purported to serve as true evaluations of task force operations and to assess outcomes as well as activities and outputs.

Hayeslip and Russell-Einhorn worked toward the development of what could be called a menu of various evaluation tools that States and individual task forces could use to help MJTF's better assess the impact of their work on drug crime, drug availability and use, drug-related crime, and law enforcement organizational effectiveness.

According to Russell-Einhorn, "Visits to 18 sites revealed a diversity in task force environments and missions and the complexities of task force evaluation." This complexity necessitates the development of tools that are similarly adaptable. The researchers reported that the site visits yielded the following insights:

- Most MJTF's play a critical frontline drug enforcement role. As a result, they must often mix street-level enforcement with the upper-level enforcement strategies that are more commonly associated with task force work.
- Rural or semirural jurisdictions face special challenges. They often cover larger areas than MJTF's in more populated areas and may have to address multiple problems concurrently, such as low-level trafficking in towns, highway interdiction, and crop eradication, along with longer term investigations of criminal organizations. In addition, local customs influence drug enforcement priorities and can create distinctive patterns of drug-related activities, such as regular drug sales at regional rodeos or airports.
- The varied demands of member agencies, citizens, and political leaders sometimes complicate MJTF strategic

## THE BYRNE PROGRAM

Through the Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance Program (the Byrne Program), the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) provides leadership and guidance on crime and violence prevention and control and works in partnership with State and local governments to make communities safe and improve criminal justice systems. BJA develops and tests new approaches in criminal justice and crime control and encourages replication of effective programs and practices by State and local criminal justice agencies. The Byrne Program, created by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 (Public Law 100–690), emphasizes controlling violent and drug-related crime and serious offenders and fosters multijurisdictional and multistate efforts to support national drug control priorities.

BJA makes Byrne Program funds available through two types of grant programs: discretionary and formula. Discretionary funds are awarded directly to public and private agencies and private nonprofit organizations; formula funds are awarded to the States, which then make subawards to State and local units of government.

planning. Some task forces have formed separate, highly flexible units to deal with covert (or overt) work stemming from these competing demands.

- Most studies overlook the important benefits of MJTF's, such as better information-sharing among local law enforcement agencies. Also, participating police officers gain invaluable practical experience from their association with a task force (although many task force personnel "graduate" to Federal or State investigative agencies, leaving personnel shortages in local departments). In addition, multiagency efforts generally result in cases that are better prepared for prosecution.
- Dissatisfaction with current reporting requirements among MJTF's is widespread because there is a common assumption that quantitative tallies of arrests and seizures can give a meaningful picture of task force effectiveness and value. Instead, officers in the field would like to see reporting and evaluation that considers changing missions and tactics and that pays more attention to local impact such as effects on drug-related crime (e.g., assaults and burglaries).

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## Toward Developing the Toolkit

"Task force leaders need better ways to collect and analyze data," said Russell-Einhorn. "The only way that researchers can evaluate the effectiveness of these task forces in the long term is through adequate and consistent data collection." The researchers' focus was on relatively easy-to-use tools that would fit the expertise and budgets of most SAA's and task forces. Data could range from statistics on drug crime, to interview information from burglary detectives (on drug-related crime impacts), to interview information from prosecutors (on the quality of cases prepared by MJTF's).

As a result of the surveys and site visits, the researchers developed a set of recommendations as a basis for developing the specific evaluation tools. They pretested the recommendations with both NIJ staff and key SAA members and held focus groups with task force personnel. They used the recommendations to draft a wide range of evaluation questions to meet diverse evaluation needs. The goal was to produce a multidimensional menu of tools that would balance questions about process, outcome, and impact.

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**For more information**

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