

EVALUATION AS A MEANS TO SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

With the current economic climate, it is more important than ever to implement programs that are cost-effective (i.e., resulting in positive outcomes for a reasonable cost). As such, funders want to know a program they are supporting is evidence-based, implemented as designed, and kept apprised of the outcomes eventually achieved. Unfortunately, many programs fail to achieve this “gold standard”, not because of a lack of good intentions but for failing to stay informed of best practices or available resources to document implementation and outcomes. A common result is a program that does not achieve its potential or is unable to document its successes and ensure continued support.

A recent publication from the Center for Court Innovations¹ documents lessons learned from criminal justice programs that experienced challenges during implementation. The goal of this review was to provide insight into how other programs can avoid making similar mistakes, by identifying four key issues and ten key lessons that “can make or break a new initiative”.

KEY ISSUES AND LESSONS FOR NEW INITIATIVES			
Engaging in Comprehensive Planning	Identifying Key Stakeholders	Responding to Emerging Challenges	Recognizing the Need for Leadership
(1) Clearly agree on and articulate program goals	(5) Be strategic for when and how to engage stakeholders	(7) Be realistic – not too ambitious – recognize limitations and adapt	(10) Designate an effective project director even in interagency collaborations
(2) Ensure program objectives can be measured	(6) Think about how to facilitate line staff buy-in	(8) Don’t overestimate caseload volume	
(3) Plan to collect data from the beginning		(9) Adapt the program in response to early implementation experiences	
(4) Formalize the program model			

As such, engaging the expertise of an outside evaluator during project start-up can be worth the investment. For over 30 years, the Criminal Justice Research Division of SANDAG has assisted local public safety and public health agencies, as well as community-based organizations to conduct process and impact evaluations. The aim of these partnerships is to work closely with partners from project start-up to implement the most useful and practical evaluation plan possible with the resources that are available. If you are implementing a new program and would like to learn more about the Division’s evaluation capabilities, please visit our Web site at www.sandag.org/cj or contact Division staff at (619) 699-6933.

¹ Cissner, A. & Farole, D., (2009). **Avoiding Failures of Implementation: Lessons from Process Evaluations**. New York, NY: Center for Court Innovations. [Available on-line at www.courtinnovation.org]