

*Evaluation News is produced by BJA's Center for Program Evaluation and Performance Measurement at the Justice Research and Statistics Association.*

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*Evaluation News provides information on the BJA Center for Program Evaluation and Performance Measurement, promotes the exchange of information on evaluation and performance measurement, and publicizes criminal justice research and evaluation reports for use by state and local criminal justice agencies.*

#### Announcements

#### **New Publication from BJA Center for Program Evaluation and Performance Measurement**



The BJA Center for Program Evaluation and Performance Measurement has produced a publication that is designed to help practitioners distinguish between good and poor quality evaluation reports. The intent is to help practitioners: 1) understand key evaluation terms and designs, and 2) recognize how to identify a well-written evaluation report. "Is This a Good Quality Outcome Evaluation Report? A Guide for Practitioners," is available at:

[http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/evaluation/reference/Quality\\_Outcome\\_Eval.pdf](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/evaluation/reference/Quality_Outcome_Eval.pdf)

#### **New Online Training Center from BJA**

BJA's National Training and Technical Assistance Center (NTTAC) recently launched a new Online Training Center. This center provides users with information through on demand access to trainings. The video training library hosts a wide range of training topics, including BJA's NTTAC's Second Tuesday at 2 webinar series. Viewers have the opportunity to watch videos, download slides/handouts, rate videos, and provide insight on materials. BJA providers are encouraged to submit videos to the Online Training Center for inclusion in the resource library. The Online Training Center is available at:

<http://bjatraining.org/category/otc/>

#### Law Enforcement

Taylor, Koper, and Woods conducted a randomized experiment to evaluate the effect of License Plate Recognition (LPR) systems on auto theft. LPR systems are high-speed camera systems that are mounted to police cars and used to scan license plates in real time, and compare them against databases of stolen vehicles, as well as vehicles connected to fugitives or other persons of interest, and alert police personnel to any matches. In this study the authors tested the utility of LPR use at locations with heavy concentrations of vehicle theft transit activity; in other words, the main transit routes where thieves are most likely to drive stolen vehicles. A total of 117 routes were identified and randomly assigned to one of three conditions: 1) LPR enhanced patrol by specialized vehicle theft unit, 2) specialized vehicle theft unit for patrol and surveillance without the LPRs, and 3) normal patrol (the control condition). The study utilized two auto theft measures including: number of auto theft calls for service and number of incidents of auto theft based on the Uniform Crime Report. The results indicate that the use of the LPRs increased the number of plates scanned by officers (8

Useful resources for criminal justice program evaluation and performance measurement are available at the BJA Center for Program Evaluation and Performance Measurement web site: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/evaluation>.

times greater) compared to manual plate checking. Further, when compared to manual checking, the LPR was associated with more “hits” (i.e., positive scans) for auto theft and stolen plates, more arrests for stolen vehicles, and more stolen vehicle recoveries. Unexpectedly, the specialized vehicle theft unit that employed manual plate checking, rather than LPR checking, was found to be associated with less auto theft two weeks after the intervention when compared to the control group (regular non-specialized patrol without LPR). Finally, there was no evidence of crime displacement occurring from their targeted routes to adjacent areas. The authors indicate that the results of this study provide evidence that LPR use can achieve demonstrable benefits in combating auto theft. The study, “Combating Vehicle Theft in Arizona: A Randomized Experiment With License Plate Recognition Technology” was published in *Criminal Justice Review* online, and the abstract is available at: <http://cjr.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/11/09/0734016811425858>

## Other Reports

### **Drug Courts**

In compliance with the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010 the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently released a report on adult drug courts. This report addresses the following questions: 1) What data does the Department of Justice (DOJ) collect on the performance of federally funded adult drug courts? 2) To what extent has it used these data in making grant related decisions? 3) What is known about the effectiveness of adult drug courts in reducing recidivism and substance abuse relapse rates? And 4) What are the costs and benefits of adult drug courts? To answer the first two questions, GAO analyzed the reporting guidance and requirements for BJA grantees; BJA-generated grantee performance data reports; and BJA’s guides for managing grants and enforcing grantee compliance. GAO also reviewed their prior reports and internal control standards, other academic literature regarding effective performance management practices. They also interviewed BJA officials. To answer the last two questions, GAO conducted a systematic review of evaluations of drug court program effectiveness and the National Institute of Justice -funded Multi-Site Adult Drug Court Evaluation. GAO found that BJA collects an array of data on drug court grantees, has begun expanding its use of this performance data to inform grant-related decisions, and that BJA generally adhered to key practices when they revised their performance measures in 2011. GAO recommended that BJA improve two practices as it continues to assess and revise its measures. First, BJA should document how it will determine if the measures were successful or whether changes would be needed. Second, BJA could improve the way it documents its decisions and incorporates feedback from stakeholders by recording key methods and assumptions used to guide its revision efforts. The report “Adult Drug Courts: Studies Show Courts Reduce Recidivism, but DOJ Could Enhance Future Performance Measure Revision Efforts,” is available at: <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-12-53>

### **Cold Case Investigations**

RAND recently conducted a study to better understand the efficacy of cold case investigations. This study had two major objectives. The first was to assess current practices in cold case investigations and agency policies and procedures to determine which are most effective in solving cold cases. The second was to determine which types of cases are most likely to be solved, and develop models for prioritizing cold-case investigations. Researchers developed and administered a national online survey of police and sheriffs’ departments to determine organizational characteristics associated with cold-case solvability. Researchers then identified four large metropolitan police agencies (Baltimore, Dallas, District of Columbia, and Denver) to visit. Once identified, the researchers worked with the four cold-case units to review cold-case files in an attempt to identify factors associated with clearance. Of the 5,000 surveys distributed, 1,051 were completed. The survey revealed the following: most agencies do little cold-case work, cold case funding is tenuous, success rates for cold case investigations are low, and factors associated with higher clearance rates included level of funding and access to investigative databases. The analysis of cold case files revealed the following: it is possible to identify factors that predict cold-case investigation success, a substantial portion of cleared cases do not result in an arrest, about one-third of sexual assault cold cases charges are not filed, and cooperation between police and prosecutors can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of cold case investigations. The researchers suggested that more research should be conducted to better

understand the return on investment of investigative resources put into cold cases relative to active cases, and to determine whether prosecutor involvement leads to a higher rate of conviction. The full Report, "Cold-Case Investigations: An Analysis of Current Practices and Factors Associated with Successful Outcomes," is available at: [http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical\\_reports/TR948.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR948.html)

### **Tip of the Month**

#### **Are you receiving an adequate number of responses? Tips for improving the response rate of web-based surveys.**

In recent years the use of web-based surveys has become increasingly popular because they are believed to be faster, better, and cheaper to conduct than telephone or mail-based surveys. Like traditional surveys, non-response is a major concern for those conducting surveys. Having a good response rate is critical to ensuring that the respondents represent the target population. In an article published in the journal, *Practical Assessment & Evaluation*, Thomas Archer discusses the results of an analysis designed to identify characteristics associated with increasing the response rates of web-based surveys. To help ensure a good response rate, the following should be done: 1) keep the survey open for approximately four weeks, 2) send at least two reminders a week apart, and 3) make potential respondents aware of the benefit of accessing and completing the survey. For more information see: <http://pareonline.net/pdf/v12n12.pdf>