

Ohio Criminal Justice Strategic Plan

Core Group Interview Executive Summary



Acknowledgements

The Office of Criminal Justice Services would like to thank the following individuals for taking time out of their busy schedules to meet with us as we embark on the arduous task of creating a statewide criminal justice strategic plan. The plan will be mindful of the vast and complex needs of all Ohioans; including local direct service providers, law enforcement, and state government agencies. The information gained from the interviews was invaluable and launched the subsequent statewide needs survey and strategic planning conference.

Donna Braxton, Executive Director; Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police

Chief Michael Harnishfeger, President; Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police

Tom Charles, Director; Ohio Department of Public Safety

Robert Cornwell, Executive Director; Buckeye State Sheriffs' Association

Sheriff Terry Lyons, President; Buckeye State Sheriffs' Association

Mike Dewine, Ohio Attorney General

David Dhume, President; County Commissioners' Association

Orman Hall, Director; Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services

Dr. Edward Latessa, Professor and Director; University of Cincinnati

John Matthews, former Director; Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

Gary Mohr, Director; Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction

Ron O'Brien, Franklin County Prosecutor

Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor, Supreme Court of Ohio

Justice Evelyn Stratton, Supreme Court of Ohio

Tracy Plouck, Director; Ohio Department of Mental Health

Harvey Reed, Director; Ohio Department of Youth Services

Alice Robinson-Bond, Crime Victim Section Chief; Ohio Attorney General's Office

Alexandria Ruden, Attorney; Legal Aid Society of Cleveland

Senator Bill Seitz, Ohio Senate

Tom Stickrath, Superintendent; Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation

Scott Sylak, Executive Director; Mental Health Recovery Services Board of Lucas County and President; Ohio Justice Alliance for Community Corrections

William Winsley, Executive Director; Ohio State Board of Pharmacy

Tim Young, Ohio Public Defender

Purpose

The core group interviews established the foundation for developing the comprehensive statewide strategic plan. The interviews were conducted May – June, 2011 with key stakeholders in fields that touch many areas of Ohio’s justice system. All interviewees were provided the same questions prior to their interview. Additional probing questions were asked based on their responses.

1. What are the top criminal justice needs in Ohio?
2. We are interested in opportunities you see for collaboration within your field as well as across the justice system. Please identify gaps where you believe improved partnerships would be beneficial.
3. What information would be helpful in your current position?
4. If you had a pot of money:
 - a. Within your agency, what area would you allocate monies to?
 - b. How would you allocate funds for the overall justice system?
 - c. What role should federal grant programs play in funding local and state programs?

Overall Themes¹

All statements contained in this report represent a summary of information provided by core group interviewees. The following themes were consistently presented during the interviews regardless of the interviewee’s field of expertise or area of specialization.

Top Criminal Justice Needs

Mental Health/Substance Abuse Treatment

Interviewees repeatedly named this as the most important need for Ohio’s justice system. The importance of evidence-based programs and overall research that lead to appropriate programming and offender placement was emphasized. Interviewees discussed the far reaching effects of not treating or incorrectly treating offenders in need of mental health and/or substance abuse treatment. This affects local and state budgets, offender populations in correctional facilities, community supervision, and overall reentry efforts.

Number of People Incarcerated

Nearly all those interviewed stated that the sentencing structure and prison overcrowding issues in Ohio need to be addressed. However many were concerned with the shift of offenders from the state to local communities. The money saved on the state level is not being funneled to local communities who will undoubtedly see an increase in demand for their services. Interviewees expressed concern over these issues and questioned whether the Legislature fully understood the implications.

¹ All views expressed in this report are those of the interviewees even though this is not repeatedly stated throughout the report to reduce redundancy.

Training/Education

The final area that was mentioned by all interviewees as a top criminal justice need was training and education for multiple groups of people. Additional training for law enforcement was suggested in the areas of dealing with mentally ill persons and accurately identifying pharmaceutical drugs. Education was suggested for local agencies on resources available for the individuals they serve and for judges on the programming to which they sentence individuals. Finally, many suggested training and education for the General Assembly on the potential effects of legislation that they propose.

Collaboration

Economic Downturn

The declining state of our current economy has forced many agencies and individuals to work together who may not have done so in the past. This includes collaboration across jurisdictions as well as within jurisdictions. According to interviewees, these newfound partnerships are the only way some agencies would remain afloat during a time of scarce resources.

Deeper Collaboration

Many interviewees struggled with finding examples of true collaboration. They believed that numerous agencies and organizations say they collaborate and are open to new opportunities to do so. However this frequently turns out to be merely lip service. Interviewees desired to go beyond mere rhetoric and put agency turf and egos aside to establish common ground. When asked how true collaboration might be initiated, interviewees suggested incentivizing collaboration by tying it to funding opportunities.

Funding

Personnel

With operating budgets slashed agencies are being required to do more with less. Interviewees described many situations where their agencies are shorthanded due to new positions and newly vacant positions remaining unfilled. Many law enforcement agencies, prosecutors and defense attorneys are undermanned. This affects public safety and the speed that accused offenders are dealt with. If provided with additional funding, nearly all interviewees indicated they would hire more skilled staff members.

Training/Education

Interviewees explained the need for increased training and education as noted above. However they also acknowledged funding to do so is extremely limited or non-existent. Agencies do not have enough money to host trainings or send their staff to

trainings, including continuing professional training for law enforcement and general continuing educational opportunities.

Stringent Nature of Federal Funding

All interviewees agreed that federal funding is necessary for local agencies. However it should be more flexible in nature. Many agencies view federal funding as a burden due to what they perceive to be an excessive amount of red tape and reporting requirements that comes with the award. Interviewees also stated that from year to year the federal allocations to grant programs can be cut without advanced notice or alternative ways to support the personnel and programming toward which the funds were going.

Data Sharing

Fight against Silos

Although this was not a direct question on the interview guide, almost every interviewee brought up their success or troubles with sharing and receiving pertinent information from other agencies. Many believed home-rule issues and a general lack of trust keep more agencies from sharing data with others targeting the same population.

Next Steps

Following the conclusion of the core group interviews in late June, OCJS began the process of developing a comprehensive survey that would be distributed statewide to those individuals working “on the ground” daily at all points of the criminal justice system including consumers. The survey consists of both general questions on Ohio’s criminal justice needs and questions specific to components of the justice system. The findings will assist in more effective use of Byrne/JAG funds as well as other programs OCJS administers.

The final step in the strategic planning process is our strategic planning conference in November. The conference will provide those in attendance the opportunity to discuss and digest all of the information received from the interviews and survey responses while providing solutions to the needs expressed. This is also a time to learn about evidence-based programming that is already being implemented throughout the state and the difference it is making.

The strategic plan will cover Ohio’s priority justice system needs and discuss the role of federal and state grant programs in addressing those needs. We want to emphasize that this process is not a one-shot deal. OCJS will be regularly completing the strategic planning process to make sure we remain abreast of the needs of Ohioans and adequately address them with new, innovative, and data-driven programs and practices.