

# Ohio Criminal Justice Strategic Plan

## Focus Group Summary



## Background

On November 4, 2011, a series of regional focus groups were held following a two-day strategic planning conference hosted by OCJS. The regions represented in the focus groups were Northwest, Northeast, Southwest, and Southeast/Central Ohio. Attendees were assigned to one of the four regions based on where they worked. Attendees who worked for regional, statewide, or U.S. agencies were assigned a region in which to participate. There were approximately 15 attendees per focus group.

Attendees were given a packet of information that included the findings of a survey conducted with key stakeholders in the criminal justice system regarding criminal justice needs and gaps in services in Ohio and were given an opportunity to review the information prior to the focus groups. Attendees then reviewed the following questions several minutes prior to the start of the focus groups and were asked to think how they would respond to these questions:

1. **What are the priority needs in your region? How do they compare to the priority needs identified by the core [interview] group?**
2. **What needs to be done to better coordinate services and share information in your region?**
3. **What needs to happen so that more agencies in your region become evidence-based organizations?**
4. **What has to be in place for your region to more effectively plan for meeting future needs?**
5. **Are there any other matters you want the strategic plan to address?**

The following pages identify the responses obtained from attendees in each focus group region. The information obtained from these focus groups will be consolidated with the information from two other source of criminal justice stakeholder input: core group interviews (conducted in May-June 2011) and a comprehensive needs assessment survey (conducted September 2011-January 2012). Together, these data will provide the basis for the OCJS Strategic Plan and will guide future Justice Assistance Grant funding decisions.

## **The priority needs identified by the core group—are these the priority needs in your region?**

### **Southwest**

- Not enough focus on victims
- More awareness needed of sex offenders, substance abuse offenders, domestic violence offenders. They will recidivate. Need resources for these offenders.
  - No evidence-based programs (EBP) for sex offenders, not only in Ohio but across U.S.
- Child support issues: need reform on sentencing for child support, improvement of services to custodial and noncustodial parents
- Housing is an issue
  - For sex offenders, mental health, as well as others re-entering society
  - Also an issue for victims, who are sometimes also evicted as well as the offender
  - Need standardization of the resources available. There is no standard practice in place for group homes, family homes, etc.
  - Homelessness is an issue costing taxpayers as they cycle through criminal justice system then back to street
- Limited English Proficiency (LEP) is an issue
  - Access to services
  - Protection order assistance
  - Include deaf community

### **Southeast/Columbus**

- For the most part, they agreed that the needs identified by core group were same as their needs, but they raised other issues too
- Incorporate substance abuse and mental health treatment with criminogenic needs
- Fees owed by offenders (court costs, reinstatement fees, child support, etc.) a problem
- Prevention, especially children of incarcerated parents
- Realize how peer association is important during reentry (for offenders). Help offenders understand and cope with relationship issues.
- Capacity to deal with offenders returning to the community
- Focus resources on cybercrime and identity theft
- Healthcare and forensic nurses—education issues and the need for multi-disciplinary training
- Technology capabilities are lacking which hinders information sharing. They would also like to use databases to evaluate information to determine if what they are doing is effective.
- Keep in mind collateral sanctions and their effects on reentry efforts

### **Northwest**

- Did not disagree with the needs identified by the core group but added/expanded on several issues
- Core group findings were not balanced throughout criminal justice system
  - Missing prevention, prosecution
  - Missing victims, particularly juveniles and domestic violence

- Education is critical and an ongoing need. Additional training needed for constantly changing criminal justice system
  - Training on domestic violence noted for law enforcement and those who work with victims
- Reentry needs for offenders
  - Transportation and housing noted, particularly in rural counties
- Need to address violent crimes, particularly those committed by veterans
- Need for greater awareness of EBP, particularly juvenile domestic violence programs
- Increased funding for diversion courts

### Northeast

- No one disagreed or commented on the findings of the core group interviews
  - Also child victimization issues and victimization of other specific groups like elderly
  - Needs to be more strategic allocation of resources regarding offender reentry
  - Need to consider non-traditional criminal justice entities as partners, i.e., ODJFS, ODH
- Need to focus on macro-level issues, not micro-level issues
  - Inefficiencies of the criminal justice system to eliminate duplication and silos. Law enforcement examples were given.
  - Collaboration and integration are vital. Current fiscal scene is the 'new normal' and collaboration, integration is a must.

## What needs to be done to better coordinate services and share information in your region?

### Southwest

- Foster collaboration and hold regular meetings between criminal justice related agencies on specific populations (homeless, mentally ill)
  - Better partnering of law enforcement and mental health (e.g., after hour access to mental health services)
  - Use reentry coalition as a framework for partnerships
  - CIT is another model of successful collaboration
  - Community Correction Boards may be another way to work on establishing relationships. They currently don't have a clear mission. Would help to have the state attend these meetings to provide input.
- Need to have a process to identify and address critical local needs. RPU's are helpful in this way. Cincinnati used to have RPU—may want to reconsider.
- Many barriers to coordination:
  - Marketing and access to information is limited—don't know what is available
  - Political affiliation
  - Lack of sharing information, and lack of trust on info to be shared
  - Regulation on federal funds
  - Interstate communication
- Churches are underutilized as partners
- Federal funds require the formation of new collaboration boards instead of using current groups—can this be streamlined?

### Southeast/Columbus

- Every county needs to have criminal justice oversight and/or planning board
- Information sharing is an issue
  - Technology is limited; doesn't allow for information sharing amongst agencies
  - Many agencies are not willing to sign releases and agree to share their information even if they have the capacity (technology) to do so
  - State level information okay. Information flows from the state but local agencies "don't know what they don't know."
- Funding
  - There is competition between Ohio regions for funding—coordinating funding and collaboration between regions specifically when you are an agency serving multiple counties. The mindset has to be changed and there has to be more willingness to collaborate.
  - Need to have info on all funding streams
- Find ways to use universal assessment instruments

## Northwest

- Regional collaboration groups
  - Locals not used to thinking regionally. OCJS should take leadership role in facilitating regional collaboration among state, county, local agencies
  - OCJS should attempt to work to expand existing collaboration boards regionally instead of requiring the creation of new/more collaborations.
  - OCJS should make these agencies aware of what resources are available
  - If resources are to be shared regionally, there needs to be a common definition and a similar protocol to follow among agencies
  - Meetings should be held regularly, and not always in Columbus
  - Potential use of a state representative's office to facilitate regional meetings
- Funding and resources
  - Competitive grants make agencies less likely to share info to those with whom they are competing for funding
  - OCJS should develop a list of available resources on its website, similar to 'No Wrong Door' from United Way. This list could be sorted regionally.
- State representatives are underutilized and locals don't communicate with them as often as they should

## Northeast

- Available resources need to be identified in the community, and matched to the appropriate populations to be served
- Colleges are underutilized
- Consider non-traditional agencies as resources, such as city planning departments partnering with law enforcement
- Information sharing needs to be improved across agencies
  - We need to think through: what is it we want to know? What is most meaningful to us? Only after we determine this should we make an effort to find out what is available
  - Is there a way to centralize data across the criminal justice system?
  - Information sharing is done well in some areas but very poorly in other areas
  - Tools like OLLEISN and OHLEG are great for law enforcement. Agencies need better education on such tools. Can these types of info sharing tools be made in other areas?
  - Information sharing can be seen as risky by some. Leadership is the key to whether info will be shared—they need to be shown the power and usefulness of information sharing.
- There needs to be a forum that allows for the sharing of knowledge, including training and technical assistance.

## What needs to happen so that more agencies in your region become evidence-based organizations?

### Southwest

- Make use of colleges and universities
  - Not only in criminal justice, but also psychology, nursing, and other departments
  - Need to include funding
  - Researchers must advertise their findings, not necessarily in published formal format—they need to get the findings to decision-makers, who can promote the practices within
  - Find a way to demonstrate what works, best practices, and case studies
  - More opportunities with colleges are needed, including dialogue and collaborations
  - Create a practitioner roundtable for practitioners to meet with university researchers to lay out a problem for discussion (UC currently does this)
  - Start a list-serv for exchanging ideas
- Funding
  - Require adherence to EBP in the grant request for proposal (RFP) and prioritize decision making on EBP
  - Require partnerships in RFP
  - Give resource for finding EBP for use when RFP is out
  - Require analytical component in RFP
- Barriers to EBP
  - Not a lot of research (and thus EBP) on specific topics: violent offenders, domestic violence
  - Sometimes EBP aren't a good fit—the population that needs programming is small and it is hard to justify all the resources (beyond just money) required for an EBP
  - Must allow for innovation (as long as there is an evaluative component)

### Southeast /Central

- Resources to identify, understand EBP
  - Provide training on EBP— so they know what EBP means
  - Repository to explain who agencies are and how they came to be (newly funded agencies so existing projects are aware of their services).
  - Link struggling agencies to those doing well to serve as mentors. Agencies will be onboard with this idea if we link it to additional funding.
  - Create an EBP list (state and/or federal) that allows agencies to submit their program? [Discussed the Crime Solutions website]
    - It was suggested that we add programs to OCJS newsletter
- Barriers to EBP
  - Innovation—don't fund only EBP because that does not allow for new and innovative programs to be funded that may work (Include promising practices that are currently being evaluated)
- EBP or a research component needs to be a requirement under the RFP

## Northwest

- Resources to identify EBP
  - Education to understand what EBP is—it is poorly defined and some say they are using EBP when they are not
  - OCJS website can serve as resource containing links to EBP
  - OCJS should educate agencies on the available EBP
- Funding
  - EBP should be required for funding
  - If there is a specific EBP program endorsed by the funder, the applicant should be made aware of this
  - Should be required to keep stats/data on the programs being implemented, and OCJS should closely monitor the use/effectiveness of the EBP
- Barriers to EBP
  - Smaller agencies might have trouble accessing and implementing EBP

## Northeast

- Information/resources on EBP
  - Knowledge of EBP and what works, e.g., a bulletin board or central site to identify EBP
  - Training to develop awareness and knowledge of EBP
  - Training to learn how to implement specific EBP, including an understanding of the need for program fidelity
  - Resources to implement EBP
  - Resources to maintain EBP
  - Raise awareness of current websites: George Mason University, Crime Solutions
  - Raise awareness of webinars on EBP by National Criminal Justice Association
  - Centers of Excellence concept extended to other areas of the criminal justice system
- Data collection
  - Need to use data to drive or support program operations and decision making
  - Agencies need to learn how to collect and use both quantitative and qualitative data
  - Are there tools available to agencies to collect data?
  - Make use of colleges/universities
- Barriers to EBP
  - Leaders need to see the incentive for change—executives see change as a risk to how they currently operate. What is the incentive vs. the risk?
  - Difficult to get EBP implemented. They are not implemented in a vacuum—their implementation needs to be considered within the larger context
- What can OCJS do?
  - Fund more prescriptive grants
  - Assist others with identifying and applying for solicitations
  - Help with initial assessments of programs
  - Help with strategic planning
  - Highlight successful programs, practices, studies, data in a format such a newsletter

## What has to be in place for your region to more effectively plan for meeting future needs?

### Southwest

- Organize regional meetings to introduce ideas brought up during strategic plan. Also a good networking opportunity
- Teach local communities how to keep the initiative moving forward
- Provide regions a list of existing collaborative efforts
  - Need to streamline any?
  - Need to reorganize?
- Provide more information more frequently
  - CJ Weekly
    - Most in room do not receive it
    - Include success stories, links, legislative updates including LSC info on bill analysis and fiscal analysis on pending bills, best practices, judicial impact statements
    - Willing to move to bi-weekly if it contained more info? Yes—only concern has to do with timely funding announcements (consider sending separate funding announcements as they occur)
    - Information, rather than links, are better included in email
  - Start a list-serv for the region, monitored and maintained by OCJS for people to exchange ideas
  - Create a one-stop shop for links by area for research/studies/best practices, funding, contacts, etc.
  - Get info from OCJS daily without having to go to the website; however, some noted that sometimes too much information can be a barrier

### Southeast/Central

- Strengthen collaboration
  - Get buy-in from partners and make sure everyone is at the table
  - It is important for agencies to collaborate with other agencies who are serving the same population (e.g., ODJFS), and also tap into volunteers
  - Encourage agencies/areas to complete their own strategic plan
  - Assess what is currently in place and where are services being duplicated. As assessment to combine service may be necessary.
  - According to some focus group attendees, collaboration already exists within RPUs.
- Stay informed and inform others
  - Always invite legislators to the table
  - Reach out to media
  - Reach out to constituents
  - Attend legislative hearings
  - Need to make others aware of new programming and resources available in the community

- Cross-training in certain areas is needed, such as health care and law enforcement (e.g., SANE nurse responsibilities, protocols)
- As a whole, the system is too reactionary
- Evaluation
  - There is no funding for program evaluation even though there is a push for all programming to be evidence-based.
  - It is difficult when program evaluation is tied to a year grant. There is no time to make corrections based on the findings, and this can be problematic because programs need the opportunity to rectify and receive technical assistance before funding is removed.

### Northwest

- Resources that are needed, which OCJS can play a lead role
  - Funding
  - Access to information and information sharing
  - Training across the justice system
  - Coordinating regional meetings, and assisting in sharing information between local agencies/RPUs
- Decision makers (i.e., legislators) need to be more informed
  - Legislators are unaware and removed from what is taking place on the ground
  - Need to increase awareness of legislators of impact of bills passed; ramifications of bills not always clearly understood
  - Local agencies should contact legislators to gain their support and raise their awareness of agency programs and issues of concern
  - Legislators need to be aware of the unfunded mandates being placed on the locals

### Northeast

- We need to be more proactive, not reactive. This can be done through information, evaluation, and assessment
  - Regional threat assessments are helpful
  - Information on emerging topics (Rx drugs, people coming out of prison...)
  - Information sharing across agencies
- Legislators need to be informed
  - Reach out to criminal justice subcommittees and other subcommittees to let them know what agencies are doing
  - Invite them to committees and task forces
  - Present them with solutions, not just problems
  - Agencies are afraid to reach out to Legislative Services Commission (LSC)—don't understand their purpose
- Need to get the perspective of consumers on these criminal justice issues we want to address

## Are there any other matters you want the strategic plan to address?

### Southwest

- Reach out to legislators
- Share our information (including strategic plan) with non-CJ groups like Department of Education, Mayor's Association, County Commissioners Association
- Work with LSC
- Rural police chiefs have anxiety over HB 86 (prisons)—this and other unmet needs of the communities need to be shared with the Governor during budget hearings

### Southeast/Central

- Focus on the entire continuum—prevention/victims/reentry
- Treatment services to address criminogenic needs
- Referrals to community substance abuse programming from high from high risk populations (probation) is an issue
  - There is an overall lack of community programming that is cognitive-based
  - There is not enough probation funding to support caseload
- Is OCJS planning to collaborate with DYS and include juveniles in the plan?
- OCJS should contact United Way of Central Ohio to see what happened when they equated funding with evidence based practices? This should be done before proceeding in this manner. Are the RPUs going to have to follow these same requirements/OCJS guidelines from the plan? They don't want to be caught in a place where they are arguing with their recipients.

### Northwest

- Need to address sentencing reform and restructuring, specifically with regard to collateral sanctions
- OCJS strategic plan should complement future DRC plans

### Northeast

Nothing noted