



American Prosecutors  
Research Institute

# *Just Look What You've Done*

## Determining the Effectiveness of Community Prosecution

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Determining the Effectiveness  
of Community Prosecution

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

***1 Introduction***

Community Prosecution Defined

Benefits of Community Prosecution:

The First Step toward Defining Goals and Objectives

***5 Defining Goals and Objectives***

***9 Counting What Counts: Simple but Effective Evaluation***

Collecting Information for the Evaluation

Tracking Implementation Milestones

Tracking Outcomes and Impacts

Interpreting the Evaluation Information

***17 The Evaluation Experience of Three Community Prosecution Efforts***

Defining Goals and Objectives for Community Prosecution  
in Rural Alabama

Outcome Measures for Community Prosecution and the  
Impact of Nuisance Abatement in Washington, D.C.

Performance Measurement in Indianapolis, Indiana

***25 Conclusion***

***27 References***



# INTRODUCTION

**M**uch has been written about community prosecution in terms of what it is and what it is not, how it operates, how to implement it, and whether it represents a philosophical change in prosecution. Yet, little is known about whether community prosecution is successful, and perhaps more importantly, how success is defined and measured. What is known has come in the form of single or limited scope studies examining one type of outcome or outcomes in one site (Worrall, 2004), but there is no uniformity or basis for comparison to help guide local prosecutors in measuring success.

One problem in sorting out what to measure in community prosecution is coming to a consensus on what success means. By their very nature, community prosecution efforts are tailored to the unique needs of the jurisdictions in which they operate. As a result, prosecutors are left to look to the effectiveness of the various community prosecution strategies in their jurisdictions and not the effectiveness of the totality of their efforts. However, at the core of community prosecution, it is quite possible that there are some shared goals not yet articulated.

This monograph is designed to help prosecutors understand how to look at the totality of their efforts by defining goals and objectives and how to use these goals and objectives to gauge the overall effectiveness of the offices' community prosecution efforts. The experiences of a few jurisdictions that have strived to document their successes are also included.

## ***Community Prosecution Defined***

Over the past two decades, the reported practice of community prosecution has become quite widespread and fairly well developed (Nugent, Fanflik, and Bromirski, 2004; Nugent and Rainville, 2001). The most current research available on community prosecution reveals three defining elements that make it different from traditional prosecution:

## JUST LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE

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1. Partnerships with a variety of government agencies and community-based groups
2. Use of varied methods including problem-solving to address crime and public safety
3. Community involvement in the problem-solving process (Nugent *et al.*, 2004)

Specifically, offices that practice community prosecution have a wider variety of partners with whom they work to address crime and public safety issues than more traditional offices, which are more likely to work with law enforcement exclusively. In addition, traditional offices tend to be more reactive to crime problems, whereas community prosecution offices are more proactive and use a more varied approach to addressing the crime and public safety, which includes use of problem-solving strategies. Finally, and perhaps the most striking difference between traditional and community prosecution offices, is the level of community involvement. Traditional offices are just as likely as community prosecution offices to view the community as a tool for providing information to the office. However, community prosecution offices are almost 10 times more likely to view the community as an active partner in the identification and development of solutions to public safety problems.

As a result of these differences, many practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers argue that community prosecution is a philosophically different way of “doing business,” and as such will have a different set of measurements to gauge performance and success. However, the American Prosecutors Research Institute’s (APRI) research continues to show that the differences between community prosecution and traditional offices have not yet risen to the level of philosophical differences. Both traditional and community prosecutors report that prosecuting crime is still the number one priority for the office. Nonetheless, community prosecution offices do rank preventing crime and making certain victims feel safe more highly than traditional offices. Consistent with other findings, APRI’s research also found that community prosecution offices report greater concern about enhancing community relations, public safety, and overall quality of life for residents than their more traditional counterparts (Nugent *et al.*, 2004).



Although there are some differences in strategies, traditional and community prosecution offices' perceptions of their roles are remarkably similar, with most of the differences arising from the relative importance of differing roles. Moreover, the research suggests that the goals of community prosecution do not differ dramatically from traditional prosecution.

***Benefits of Community Prosecution:  
The First Step toward Defining Goals and Objectives***

Speak with a group of experienced community prosecutors and they will tell you, quite adamantly, that what they do differs dramatically from the work of traditional prosecutors and that there is no good way to measure it. They are right, to an extent—the strategies being used are different—community prosecutors tend to be more proactive and use a wider variety of problem-solving strategies to address crime and public safety problems than traditional prosecutors. However, ask these same experienced community prosecutors why they use these strategies and you may be surprised to find that their reasons will be remarkably similar to those given by traditional prosecutors for the strategies they choose. It is very likely that community prosecutors will tell you that they use various strategies to ensure safer communities, just as a traditional prosecutor will tell you that taking criminals off the street makes communities safer. Ultimately, regardless of the strategies used, the goals and objectives for both community and traditional prosecution offices are largely the same, with most of the differences arising from the relative importance of the different goals and objectives.

At the macro-level, the community prosecution approach can help facilitate long-term change by ensuring that communities are safer and more secure; by promoting the fair, impartial, and expeditious pursuit of justice; and by promoting integrity in the prosecution profession, including coordination in the community. Community prosecution shifts the focus from specific cases and victims to the victimization of the community as a whole. Thus, the long-term benefits of practicing community prosecution may include the following:

- Reduced violent crime
- Reduced property crime

## JUST LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE

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- Reduced nuisance crime
- Reduced fear of crime
- Reduced prosecutorial caseload that results in the timely and efficient administration of justice
- Increased public confidence and trust in the system
- Increased offender accountability to the community
- Increased satisfaction among victims
- A community better educated about the justice system and its processes
- Cost-savings as a result of maximizing the use of limited resources through the use of coordinated approaches and partnerships
- Improved prosecutorial accountability to the community

At the micro-level, more immediate benefits that may be observed as a direct result of specific strategies employed as part of community prosecution include the following:

- Reduced calls for service and fewer complaints from the community about identified problems
- Increased intelligence about crimes and offenders for prosecution
- Reduced duplication of effort on the part of law enforcement, prosecutors, and other allied agencies and organizations
- Increased cooperation and participation of victims and witnesses
- Increased community involvement in developing and sustaining long-term solutions to crime problems
- Increased cooperation and communication among law enforcement, prosecutors, other government agencies, and the community

It is these benefits, at the macro- and micro-level, that serve as the foundation for defining goals and objectives.

# DEFINING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Generally, people use the terms “goals” and “objectives” interchangeably. However, goals and objectives are *not* the same:

*Goals describe the desired end result—not the means to the end—and answer the question of what the long-term expected impact of community prosecution is.*

*Objectives are the shorter-term “benchmarks” that indicate progress is being made toward the goals and describe in measurable terms who or what will change, by how much, and over what period of time.*

Often, goals are used to define the overall impact of the effort, while objectives define the more immediate outcomes. Another way to help distinguish between goals and objectives is that goals tend to be more abstract, whereas objectives are more concrete.

When defining goals and objectives for community prosecution, there are several questions that prosecutors should ask themselves as part of the process:

- *Why do you want to or did you implement community prosecution as a whole (not as a result of a specific activity), and what do you or did you hope to achieve as a result? (Goals)*

The answer or answers to these questions represent the goal(s) of your community prosecution effort. Is it to reduce serious crime? Perhaps it is to improve the quality of life or the community’s sense of safety or even to prevent crimes from happening. Or it may be something different. But whatever it is, it should represent the long-term vision about what will be different as a result of the community prosecution effort.

- *What type of information will convince you that you’ve obtained your goals? What are the indicators that provide evidence in support of your goal*

## JUST LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE

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*attainment?* (Measures of goals and/or beginning development of objectives)

If the goal is to reduce serious crime, then measures of serious crime are needed such as arrests, calls for service, and reported victimizations. If the goal is improving quality of life, measures of quality of life are needed such as residency rates, property values, code violations, or the community's perception of quality of life. This is information that you will track over time to determine if long-term change is occurring.

- *What must happen in the community in order to realize the long-term change? What events or issues are contributing to or causing the problem?* (Objectives)

The answers to these questions represent the objectives of your community prosecution effort. For example, information gathered from the community as part of a needs assessment indicated that residents felt their quality of life suffered because they were afraid to go to the neighborhood convenience store; large groups of teenagers loiter in and around the store, often fighting, or they were afraid of people loitering in the playground, drinking alcohol all day and using the shrubs as bathroom facilities. In these examples, changes must occur in and around the convenience store and in the playground.

- *Now that you know what needs to change, what is a reasonable amount of change that will occur and over what period of time?*

For example, you might want to work to reduce the number of calls about fights around the convenience store by 50 percent in one year. As with goals, the answers to these questions will represent the information to be collected to demonstrate progress toward objectives and ultimately goal attainment.

APRI recommends that offices follow a structured planning process that incorporates evaluation from the outset. Generally, the planning process consists of four steps that will help prosecutors identify goals and objectives, followed by strategies that are logically related to what the office hopes to achieve. The four steps, as outlined in the *Community Prosecution*

*Planning and Implementation Guide*, are as follows:

1. Conduct needs and resource assessments
2. Establish goals and objectives
3. Define activities
4. Implement activities

Although this planning process may seem elementary, it is imperative that some structure exists in order to establish causal relationships between the activities that are implemented as part of the community prosecution effort and any observed outcomes or impacts. For example, assume your goal is to eliminate drug use and your plan to accomplish this is to implement a truancy program in one elementary school. Could you reasonably claim that the reductions in drug arrests and drug-related fatalities that are observed in the first six months of the truancy program are a direct result of the program itself? The answer is, “No you couldn’t.” It is more likely that the observed changes were a result of some other effort.

Still confused about goals and objectives? A good analogy is to think of setting goals and objectives like planning a road trip. First, you decide what your final destination will be ... your goal. Second, you figure out what it’s going to take to get you there (e.g., you must drive 400 miles each day for three days or you must get to X location by Saturday evening); these are your objectives. Finally, you track your progress; you record miles, outline progress on your map, etc. How you choose to get to your location, for instance driving or biking, represents the strategy or activity for achieving your objectives and ultimately reaching your final destination. So if the road trip requires you to cover 1,200 miles in three days, you probably wouldn’t choose walking as your primary strategy for reaching your destination.



# COUNTING WHAT COUNTS: SIMPLE BUT EFFECTIVE EVALUATION

The most effective evaluations address two distinct issues: (1) the implementation process, and (2) the outcomes or impacts of your actions. Thus, a solid evaluation strategy includes both a process and an outcome or impact evaluation. A process evaluation answers the questions, “Did you implement the activities that you planned to implement, and how well?” The outcome evaluation focuses on the changes that have occurred as a result of community prosecution.

Prosecutors should first focus on the “process” side of evaluation. Each activity implemented will produce some form of process outcome. In other words, if one activity is to obtain the passage of an ordinance to prohibit single container alcohol sales, an immediate outcome of the activity would be the passage of the ordinance. If another activity is to organize neighborhood watch groups, the activity/process outcome would be the organization of a specific number of groups.

Again, it may be useful to think of the process evaluation as the road map for your trip. You have a final destination in mind, you know how long you have to get there, but how will you know if you’re making progress? The most effective way to judge your progress is by establishing milestones (e.g., activity/process outcomes). Examples of implementation milestones may include:

- Number of meetings or contacts with community or other agencies
- Number of arrests made, charges filed, or cases disposed
- Number and type of community issues addressed (e.g., four drug houses closed, five street lights repaired)
- Frequency of events (e.g., meetings twice a month, weekly code enforcement)
- “Dosage” of activities (e.g., number of community service hours logged by community court defendants, number of hours of training/services received for community/business/others)
- Number of people targeted/served by specific programmatic initiatives (e.g., a truancy intervention program)

## JUST LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE

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The implementation milestones, which represent activity/process outcomes, provide a mechanism for ensuring the community prosecution effort is on track for achieving its goals and objectives and provides you with information that will allow you to make adjustments in your effort if it is not on track. Moreover, the implementation milestones tell the story, “This is what we’re doing, how we’re doing it, and how well we’re doing it.”

The process evaluation is a critical component of the outcome evaluation, which is why both the process and the outcome evaluation are important and should be undertaken. Without the process evaluation and documentation of the activities, it would be virtually impossible to demonstrate a cause-and-effect relationship between your efforts and any observed change found in the outcome evaluation.

The goals and objectives established as part of the planning process form the foundation for the outcome and impact evaluation. Remember, goals are used to define the overall impact of the effort, while objectives define the more immediate outcomes. In an outcome evaluation, the focus is on measuring whether the objectives have been achieved and/or to what degree they have been achieved. An outcome evaluation will basically explore the differences in a specified condition before an initiative and after an initiative. For example, an outcome evaluation of a nuisance abatement program focused on drug houses may examine the number of drug houses prior to the implementation of the program and after a program. An impact evaluation, on the other hand, focuses on the broader impacts that a program has had on specified conditions (i.e., the goals), and in this example may include reductions in drug-related crime. As such, impact measures would focus on indicators of drug-related crime such as arrests or calls for service.

Impact measures fall into four broad categories:

1. System measures: systems improvements, for example, reduced time spent dealing with problem properties after community prosecution was implemented or fewer misdemeanor cases handled in criminal court as a result of community court resolution.



2. Community measures: improvements in the community such as changed attitudes or feelings about the criminal justice system or public safety, environmental design improvements, and socio-economic changes (e.g. increased housing values, more business license applications, and lower truancy rates).
3. Crime measures: outcomes related to changes in criminal offending such as reduced calls for service, decreases in reported crime, decreased probation revocations, and decreased recidivism.
4. Cost-benefit/cost-effectiveness measures: outcomes that examine resources and dollars invested as part of community prosecution compared to resources and dollars invested prior to community prosecution.

Although the distinctions between outcome and impact evaluation are slight, and often the terms are used synonymously, the impact evaluation examines whether the overall goals have been reached. In other words, did the combined effects of all the activities and objectives met produce a long-term, sustained change? The outcome and impact measures selected should be directly related to both the problems being addressed and the activities implemented. For example, it wouldn't make a lot of sense to measure the impact of closing problem bars with the truancy rate. Also, the measures used should be appropriate for the focus area. If your community prosecution effort is targeted toward a specific geographic area in your jurisdiction such as a police district, a county- or city-wide crime rate may not capture the outcomes of your efforts; a better measure would be reported crime, calls for service, or the crime rate (if available) for that specific police district.

### ***Collecting Information for the Evaluation***

The most effective and useful evaluations run concurrently with the implementation of the community prosecution effort. Goals and objectives should be measured at the start of community prosecution (before any activities take place) to establish a baseline and again at regular intervals from that point on.

Gathering information for the evaluation does not necessarily mean hiring an evaluator or statistician nor does it necessarily mean designing complicated data collection instruments. In measuring your goals, objectives, and implementation milestones, you will simply be describing changes in conditions, projects, people, resources, and the environment by either conducting or compiling observations, interviews, reports, and statistics. On the other hand, for more complex evaluation designs that examine outcomes and impacts, you may wish to consider hiring an outside evaluator.

### ***Tracking Implementation Milestones***

It is very likely that as part of day-to-day activities, you will be gathering information on your implementation milestones without even knowing it. The following list provides a few examples of sources for information on your implementation milestones:

- Progress reports that detail items such as contacts with community members and specifics about activities
- Project calendars that show the timeline of planned and actual activities conducted and meeting schedules
- Budget and financial reports that outline costs associated with community prosecution implementation as well as more detailed information about the nature of the costs
- Activity logs completed by community prosecutors detailing activities such as the number, nature, and substance of contacts with the community; the number of problems identified and addressed; and the types of activities performed by the community prosecutor such as participating in a community-based crime prevention fair
- Meeting agendas and meetings that outline problems identified, strategies implemented, successful conduct of activities, satisfaction with resolution of problems
- Staff memos that report on activities

To track implementation milestones using these types of “administrative” materials, you will need to ensure that the staff who prepares the materials reports on the relevant implementation milestone and conducts an on-going review to tabulate the information on the milestones. For

example, you may want to ask your community prosecutors to complete activity logs and prepare a summary table with the number of community contacts, number of problems identified, and so forth, or as a manager, you may wish to compile the summary table yourself after reviewing the activity reports. Regardless of how implementation milestones are initially tracked, it is important that you track them consistently and on a regular basis—daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, or semi-annually.

### ***Tracking Outcomes and Impacts***

Information on objective (outcome) and goal (impact) attainment can be gathered through a variety of formal and less formal mechanisms. Virtually all outcome and impact evaluations have quantitative data as evidence of the changes, which is important. However, quantitative data, particularly in the form of complex statistics, is not the only method for measuring outcomes and impact.

One easy way to track changes, particularly environmental changes, is with observations. Staff, interns, or volunteers can use a field observation guide that describes what to look for and then physically go to the community, make the observations, and record the information. These observations can later be tabulated, thereby creating quantitative/numeric information. Another mechanism is to take “before” and “after” pictures. It is recommended that you take “after” pictures regularly to demonstrate that the outcome has been sustained over time.

Interviews are another method for tracking change. Consider conducting an annual needs assessment. If a problem is identified as a priority in one year and subsequently diminishes in priority or disappears all together, it is likely that the problem has been resolved. An on-going needs assessment can help you quantify problems that have been prevented or eliminated.

Another interview method includes formal and informal surveys. You can conduct informal surveys at community meetings or by “man-on-the-street” interviews, asking whether or not local residents have perceived a change in their neighborhood or if they feel differently about the neighbor-

hood. More formal surveys could include an annual quality of life questionnaire distributed throughout the neighborhood or placed in the local newspaper for residents to complete and drop off at central locations (e.g., grocery or convenience stores, schools, or libraries). Interns from local colleges, particularly those in sociology departments, are a good resource for assistance in designing a formal survey and analyzing the results. Use interns or volunteers to help conduct in-person or phone surveys of residents.

Statistical information does not have to be complicated. Many of the agencies that are partners in the community prosecution effort produce annual reports that track information on the types of problems you are working to change. Other government agencies are an excellent source of information on community indicators such as residency rates, property values, educational level, truancy, code violations, and applications for business permits. Relevant information can be excerpted from these agency reports on an annual basis and listed in tabular form. In addition, partnerships with various government agencies can help you obtain more specific data focused on the targeted areas. Local law enforcement agencies maintain numerous relevant data, such as criminal complaints, calls for service, arrest rates, and crime rates. The courts or even your own office will have information on charges filed, dispositions, and convictions.

Finally, never underestimate the power of the press. Newspapers and other media outlets can be a particularly valuable tool for tracking changes. Review news reports or clip newspaper articles on the neighborhood or the problems that you are trying to address. Over time, you can review the reports and articles, and track whether or not coverage changes from negative to positive, if the reports drop off because the problem has been resolved, or even if the problem has changed.

### ***Interpreting the Evaluation Information***

Perhaps the most difficult task in evaluation is making sense of all the information that you've been collecting. There are six guiding questions that can make the task simpler:

1. What difference did your efforts make?
2. What changes have occurred?

3. To what can you attribute these changes?
4. What other factors could have caused these changes?
5. What other changes occurred that you didn't anticipate?
6. What are the implications of these changes?

In answering the first two questions (what difference did your efforts make and what changes have occurred), review the information you have collected and compare it to the “baseline” information collected as part of your planning process to determine if there has been a change. Then, examine your implementation milestones to determine if these appear to have caused the changes or if milestones were missed along the way, which may contribute to not having achieved the intended change.

If there is an observable change, either positive or negative, examine other events and activities that were happening in the jurisdiction over the time period. Did any significant socio-economic changes occur? For example, was there a surge in unemployment (which can lead to increased crime) or a horrific event that galvanized the community? Did another agency implement activities or programs that targeted the same issues as your community prosecution effort? These other events can bolster, diminish, or supercede the impact that your efforts had on problems.

By addressing certain problems, the community prosecution effort may have an unanticipated negative or positive impact on related problems. Examples of unanticipated negative outcomes include displacement of the problem or creation of new problems to be addressed. For example, an effort to make playgrounds safer for parents and their children may drive drug dealers into abandoned houses or to another part of the jurisdiction. Unanticipated positive outcomes might include improved efficiency, increased cost-savings, creation of new services, or socio-economic changes such as decreased vacancy rates, increased home ownership, and increased school attendance.

Don't be discouraged if you find no change at first; it's not necessarily a negative finding. If this happens, stop and ask the question, “Is it possible that the problem would have been worse without community prosecution?” One way to determine the answer to that question is to look at

other parts of the jurisdiction where community prosecution is not operational or neighboring jurisdictions to see if they experienced the same problems and if the degree of negative change is greater than in your community prosecution area. If it is, you can reasonably claim that without community prosecution, the problem would have gotten significantly worse, as it did in the other areas.

It is common to find that the problem appears to have increased in severity, particularly in the early stages of community prosecution. Is this a result of increased awareness and increased reporting of the problem? For example, early efforts to address domestic violence or child abuse created a tremendous amount of public knowledge about domestic violence, which resulted in more reports being made to law enforcement and subsequently more arrests. By tracking the same indicators over time, the evaluation will allow you to answer this question—first by seeing an increase and then a slow but consistent decrease.

Other evaluation methods, such as cost-benefit/cost-effectiveness studies, are more rigorous both in how the data are compiled and the interpretation of findings. Cost-effectiveness analyses are usually the first step in an overall costs-benefits analysis. The cost-effectiveness analysis allows you to assign a dollar value to objectives to make comparisons to alternative strategies or programs. In general, cost-benefit analyses allow you to compare the costs of community prosecution with the value of the outcomes (i.e., the benefits). Typical cost-benefit analyses use a calculated cost of community prosecution and the calculated costs associated with the benefits to examine ratios of costs to benefits, rate of return on investment, and cost/benefit of other related criminal justice or program efforts designed to achieve the same outcomes as community prosecution. Because of the highly complex nature of cost-benefit/cost-effectiveness analyses, it is strongly recommended that an outside expert in these types of analyses be retained.

# THE EVALUATION EXPERIENCE OF THREE COMMUNITY PROSECUTION EFFORTS

Since the early conceptualization of community prosecution, prosecutors have struggled with how to document the effectiveness of community prosecution. APRI's Office of Research and Evaluation (OR&E) has worked closely with a number of jurisdictions over the years to help them evaluate their efforts.

The evaluation assistance provided to various sites has ranged from initial goal and objective definition to an impact evaluation of a specific community prosecution strategy. More recently, the OR&E's efforts have focused on defining performance measures for community prosecution.

## ***Defining Goals and Objectives for Community Prosecution in Rural Alabama***

In early 2004, the district attorney in Marshall County, Alabama, contacted the OR&E for assistance in developing and implementing a community prosecution program in the county. The county, located in the northeastern corner of the state, is largely rural and has an estimated population of a little more than 82,300, not including the many undocumented immigrants that reside in the county.

The district attorney believed that community prosecution could help him address both serious crime and quality-of-life crimes. As part of the implementation effort, he wanted to ensure that he would be able to document effectiveness, and as such, asked the OR&E to assist with the development of measurable goals and objectives.

The first step in defining the goals and objectives for Marshall County was to initiate a community needs assessment that addressed several fundamental questions:

- What are the community's crime and public safety concerns?
- How does the community prioritize these concerns?

## JUST LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE

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- What are the causes of crime in the community?
- For solutions to be effective, what other agencies in the community would need to be involved to address crime problems?

OR&E staff facilitated a day-long focus group meeting with 55 members of the community to help answer these questions. The community members ranged from retired persons, farmers, and stay-at home mothers to bankers, representatives from the schools, business owners, and representatives of the media. Community members were asked about their perceptions of crime and public safety in the county. Responses were recorded on poster paper and placed in front of the meeting room so that the community could see the lists of concerns. Once the lists were compiled, the community members were asked to place a red sticker next to the problem they believed had the most impact on community safety and quality of life, a yellow sticker on the next highest priority, and a green sticker on the third highest priority.

In total, the community members identified four primary crime issues: (1) drug use and the criminal activity related to drug crime; (2) lack of early interventions to address issues such as truancy, dropout rates, and teen pregnancy; (3) lack of punishment and accountability for criminal offenders; and (4) vandalism, littering, and burglary. The community members identified a number of potential causes to be addressed by the community prosecution effort:

- Drug related crime and criminality caused by the availability of products used to produce methamphetamine, intergenerational use of drugs in families, lucrativeness of the drug trade and the demand for drugs, and an increase in the number of drug users.
- Lack of early intervention mechanisms included lack of parental involvement, lack of resources for families, lack of education, and lack of collaborative relationships with schools to identify “at-risk” youth.
- Punishment and accountability which community members believed to be caused by too much judicial discretion with regard to sentencing,



early release of convicted persons, and lack of familiarity among community members (e.g., neighbors don't know each other).

- Vandalism, littering, and burglary caused by laws not being enforced by local law enforcement, little or no effective punishment, lack of education, and lack of pro-social activities for youth.

The district attorney created a justice council comprised of community members, representatives from various county government agencies, and business owners to develop goals and objectives based on the information from the community meetings. The OR&E asked the council members to address three primary questions:

1. What is the desired long-term impact that should occur if the public safety problems are identified and their causes addressed?
2. What would need to change in order to achieve the impact?
3. What are the specific indicators of that change?

The discussions related to these questions yielded two primary goals: strengthened families in Marshall County and more effective and fiscally sound systems. The objectives related to strengthened families included a reduced number of children in foster care, decreases in domestic violence, lower divorce rates, lower teen pregnancy rates, and a reduced number of drug- and alcohol-addicted persons. The objectives associated with effective and fiscally sound systems included better community health, reduced budgets, lower dropout rates, and increased school test scores.

### ***Outcome Measures for Community Prosecution and the Impact of Nuisance Abatement in Washington, D.C.***

The U.S. Attorney's Office (USAO) in Washington, D.C. is considered a leader in the field of community prosecution. The U.S. attorney acts as the local prosecutor for the city and has been involved in community prosecution for more than a decade. Over the years, the community prosecutors have engaged in numerous activities designed to decrease crime and increase feelings of public safety throughout the city and in

## JUST LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE

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specific high crime police districts. Examples of the various strategies that the office has used are:

- Nuisance abatement of problem buildings (both commercial and residential)
- Monthly interagency law enforcement meetings for problem-solving
- Publication of the *Court Report* that provides a city-wide accounting of significant cases
- Operation Fight Back, a public housing initiative aimed at dealing with problem tenants
- Attendance at the mayor's town hall meetings
- An Alcohol Beverage Regulation Administration (ABRA) initiative to deal with problem nightclubs
- Community outreach

The USAO had collected basic process and outcome information about their efforts, such as logs of properties abated and crime data. However, the office had been unable to use the information to demonstrate in a meaningful way that community prosecution is making a difference in the District of Columbia.

To help the USAO make better use of the information collected, APRI's OR&E suggested two levels of outcome measures: micro-level and macro-level. The micro-level outcomes would focus on the immediate outcomes of the various activities and initiatives implemented (i.e., what outcomes did the individual activity/strategy produce?).

As one set of micro-level measures, the OR&E recommended the use of existing data to determine the number of active abatements (properties identified for abatement), the number of properties abated, and the amount of time needed to abate a property. For the law enforcement monthly meetings, which were designed around case development and problem-solving, recommended measures included case closure and plea rates. For Operation Fight Back, the OR&E recommended that the USAO collect data on the number of referrals for eviction review/investigation and the number of evictions in public housing as well as crime data from the specific public housing developments. Additionally, an impact measure of Operation Fight Back might include an attitudinal sur-

vey of housing residents to gauge “cultural” change in the developments as well as residents’ perception of changes in quality of life. With the ABRA work, the OR&E suggested analyzing data related to calls for service and actual crime/arrests. Finally, in order to measure the outcomes of the community outreach effort, the OR&E recommended an assessment of residents’ knowledge about the community prosecution initiative. One method for assessing knowledge is a short questionnaire, distributed through faith-based organizations and/or the business community, and associated with “raffles,” whereby persons completing the questionnaire are given a chance to win a prize such as a store gift certificate.

The USAO also wanted to be able to demonstrate a more significant impact of their community prosecution initiatives, and in particular, their nuisance abatement activities. To meet this need, APRI’s OR&E worked with the USAO to develop a cost-benefits analysis. The USAO collected the following pieces of information for the analysis on a sample of properties that had been abated:

- Number of calls for service to nuisance property
- Average amount of time spent by officers responding to a nuisance call
- Average number of officers responding per call
- Average hourly rate for an officer
- Average hourly rate for a warrant execution
- Average time spent processing an arrest
- Average assistant United States attorney (AUSA) hourly rate
- Average AUSA hours per case
- Number of properties abated
- Number of arrests made at nuisance property
- Number of warrants served at nuisance property
- Number of calls for service after property abatement
- Number of arrests after property abatement
- Number of warrants served after property abatement
- Length of USAO involvement with nuisance property

This information was used to calculate the costs associated with each nuisance property before and after the abatement as well as the costs associated with the actual abatement of the property. The analyses, based on nine properties, showed that the nuisance properties cost the city an average of

\$35,000 prior to the abatement effort and only \$584 after the abatement effort. When the costs for abatement were taken into consideration (approximately \$27,600) and the costs for law enforcement after the abatement were projected out to an annual estimate, the USAO's nuisance abatement efforts saved the city an estimated \$39,000 per year (for just nine properties).

### ***Performance Measurement in Indianapolis, Indiana***

The Marion County Prosecuting Attorney's Office (MCPAO) is another office considered a leader in the field of community prosecution. Like the District of Columbia, the Marion County effort has been underway for more than a decade and uses a variety of strategies to deal with low-level offenders and quality-of-life issues.

APRI's OR&E began working with the MCPAO as part of an National Institute of Justice (NIJ)-funded project to develop and test performance measures in community prosecution. Initial discussions focused on developing a measure of each strategy being used as part of the community prosecution initiative. For example, the community prosecutors wanted to document the following outcomes and impacts for their various strategies:

- Community court: cost-benefit; length of time to process cases
- Nuisance abatement: cost-benefit
- Community impact panels: community satisfaction with case outcomes; hours of community service
- Court watch: increased sentences for offenders
- Educating Kids about Guns: changed perception of gun violence among kids
- Red Zone initiative: reduction in prostitution and decreased recidivism among "Johns"
- Community outreach/meetings: number of people requesting meetings, number of people attending meetings
- Truancy: number of detention orders, changes in attendance, behavioral changes
- Narcotics evictions: reduced drug crimes and related crimes

However, unlike traditional evaluation, in which one examines the outcomes or impacts of different strategies, performance measures are

designed to understand how well an office is performing with regard to its overall goals and objectives. As such, the OR&E worked with the MCPAO community prosecutors to articulate what they hoped to gain as a result of all the strategies combined (i.e., what is the goal of the office in implementing community prosecution). In response, MCPAO noted that community prosecution was intended to;

- Hold offenders accountable, particularly lower level offenders who generally slip through the traditional system
- Reduce crime and recidivism
- Deter violent crime and other crime that encourages violence by addressing conditions in the community that allow violent crime to flourish
- Process cases in a timely and efficient manner

From these overall goals, the OR&E identified a number of performance measures to demonstrate how well the community prosecution effort is performing. The measurement framework includes several performance measures for each goal:

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Performance Measures</b>
Holding offenders accountable	Sentence length
	Ratio of pleas to lesser charges and pleas as charged
	Ratio of offenders sent to community court vs. total offenders in traditional court
	Ratio of convictions to cases charged
	Defendant’s understanding of social responsibility
	Decreased truancy
Reducing crime and recidivism	Drug crime rate/drug-related crime rate
	Rate of gun carrying among juveniles
	Juvenile violent crime rate

*continued*

## JUST LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE

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	Prostitution solicitation rate
Deterring violent crime and crime that encourages violence	Public safety rating of office (based on six safety factors)
	Violent crime rate
	Public nuisance calls for service
	Ratio of nuisance actions taken to calls for service for property/violent crimes
	Ratio of vacant home to calls for service
	Sense of security in the neighborhood
Processing cases in a timely and efficient manner	Case disposition time
	Cost of administering justice

Each of these measures is being tested to make sure that the information is available to support the use of these measures in Indianapolis (Marion County) and to determine their utility for the MCPAO. If successful, the MCPAO will be the first office in the country to have developed and implemented a system of performance measurement for community prosecution.

## CONCLUSION

The local prosecutor's role in crime prevention and control is one of the most important in the justice system—one that is strengthened with the implementation of community prosecution. Although a significant amount of attention is paid to the implementation of community prosecution, it is important that a system for documenting success be implemented as early as possible and preferably along with the implementation of the community prosecution effort.

As funding for special initiatives dwindles, prosecutors and others often scramble to justify their need to continue the initiative. At that point, however, it is difficult if not impossible to demonstrate meaningful change in terms of outcomes (changes before and after an initiative) and impacts (broader implications for public safety based on outcomes). Prosecutors should keep in mind that it is almost always impossible to demonstrate how far you have come if you cannot provide evidence of where you started.

As demonstrated in this monograph, evaluation does not have to be a complicated or overly cumbersome task. The most effective way to ensure that evaluation will be manageable and useful is to incorporate it into the planning process by focusing on the development of solid goals and objectives. Moreover, once these goals and objectives are defined, prosecutors should use them to frame the rest of the initiative. Simple steps, such as implementation milestones and basic outcome measures, can help prosecutors measure their progress. More importantly, this will facilitate necessary mid-course corrections to increase the likelihood that their community prosecution strategies, activities, and efforts will produce the desired changes.

Prosecutors, like other justice practitioners, are increasingly being called upon to demonstrate effectiveness and provide empirical support for the performance of their offices. A solid understanding of goals and objectives as well as effective program evaluation strategies will help prosecutors in their efforts to articulate performance measures for their office and community.





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