

# **COLLABORATION IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE COORDINATING COUNCILS**



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*Abstract: The criminal justice system features multiple independent agencies working parallel to each other. Criminal justice coordinating councils (CJCCs) foster agency collaboration to better address county criminal justice issues. This article describes CJCCs and examines the limited available research on them.*

## Introduction

Most states, including Illinois, operate criminal justice systems at the county level and with little coordination between them.<sup>1</sup> Illinois' 102 counties and 24 judicial circuits have unique issues and needs with varying resources and support. Each department of the criminal justice system, from police to parole, is individually funded with impact and success defined within the narrow scope of each organization.<sup>2</sup> Criminal justice coordinating councils (CJCCs) offer a way for these agencies to collaboratively address county criminal justice issues.<sup>3</sup> Much of the quantitative and qualitative research on coordinating council efficacy and efficiency comes from studies on domestic violence and family violence coordinating councils.

The Illinois State Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform recommended the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) establish county-based CJCCs.<sup>1</sup> To help jurisdictions implement CJCCs, ICJIA partnered with the National Criminal Justice Reform Project from the National Governors' Association; Loyola University's Center on Criminal Justice Research, Policy and Practice; and the National Criminal Justice Association to offer technical support, data analysis, and strategic planning assistance.<sup>4</sup> In 2017, ICJIA awarded five counties—Lake, McHenry, McLean, Winnebago, and St. Clair counties technical assistance grants to establish CJCCs.

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Source: Nugent-Borakove & Beeman, 2013<sup>5</sup>

## CJCC Overview

CJCCs are committees that facilitate cross-agency collaboration and information exchange within the criminal justice system.<sup>6</sup> CJCCs assist counties in creating and sustaining collaboration among a variety of criminal justice agencies and stakeholders while gaining a more thorough understanding of criminal justice issues. Additionally, CJCCs can guide better use of resources, reduce costs of the criminal justice system, and devise more effective and sustainable criminal justice initiatives and programs.<sup>7</sup> CJCCs may operate to address general criminal justice issues or target specific criminal justice issues, including domestic violence, intimate partner violence, family violence, and juvenile justice.<sup>8</sup>

The scope of CJCCs is broad and may vary based on legislative and internal mandates. CJCCs feature committee membership and typically focus on policy development, resource allocation, and problem solving complex social issues through coordinated efforts.<sup>9</sup> Councils achieve this through:

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://bit.ly/2LicKBF>

- Data collection and analysis of criminal justice operations.
- Identification of the most pervasive problems.
- Collaboration toward solutions.
- Development of budget strategies.<sup>10</sup>

Research on 41 Family Violence Coordinating Councils, which are similar in structure to CJCCS but focus on the issue of family violence, found their members participated in the following activities:

- Information sharing
- Discussing issues
- Identifying issues of system's response
- Promoting public/community education
- Supporting and training key stakeholders in the community response
- Lobbying non-member stakeholders.

The country's first CJCC formed in the 1930s in Los Angeles, Calif., to address a perceived juvenile "crime wave."<sup>11</sup> CJCCs continued to develop in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s as state and local governments collaborated on how federal Law Enforcement Assistance Administration funding would be spent. Today, while the United States is comprised of more than 3,000 counties, fewer than 100 CJCCs exist in a capacity outside of collaborating as a necessary condition of awarded federal or state grant funding.<sup>12</sup>

Source: Javdani & Allen, 2011<sup>13</sup>

## Membership & Staff

CJCC membership varies based on county size, though most generally consist of elected and/or appointed local justice agency directors, others with a vested interest in local government, and community members. These may include substance use and mental health treatment providers; victim's advocates; those offering housing resources; workforce training or educational assistance; veteran's advocates; members of faith-based groups; offender rights group representatives; and former offenders.<sup>14</sup> To be effective, CJCCs need consistent engagement from its members. Since many CJCCs form in response to an ad hoc need, after the urgency of a problem wanes, some members may become less engaged.<sup>15</sup> CJCCs include an executive committee and some establish subcommittees to cover special topics or issues that arise.

Generally, CJCCs are housed within county administration offices; a survey of 60 CJCCs in 17 states found 70 percent of CJCC staff were housed in county administration offices.<sup>16</sup> Some CJCCs hire dedicated staff to aid in establishing long-term criminal justice system coordination.<sup>17</sup> These individuals typically report to the county manager. Job duties include planning meetings; keeping records; grant writing or assisting agencies in applying for grants; and writing briefs and reports.<sup>18</sup> CJCC staff should be skilled in project management, data analysis, grant management, and other skills based on county needs.<sup>19</sup> The Justice Management

Institute's National Network of Criminal Justice Coordinating Councils offers sample CJCC staff job descriptions and other CJCC resources.<sup>2</sup>

## Funding

Counties with CJCCs are in a better position to apply for and be awarded grant funding to address criminal justice issues.<sup>20</sup> Councils that can illustrate collaborative problem-solving may be more attractive to funding agencies.<sup>21</sup> A funding source, such as county or grant funds, can help solidify agency buy-in and support coordination efforts because resources are available to help reach set goals. However, in a study of 66 CJCCs in 17 states, 42 percent of CJCCs reported having no budget.<sup>22</sup> A challenge to CJCCs in accomplishing their goals are budgetary/fiscal issues and internal structure/operational issues.<sup>23</sup>

## Potential Benefits of CJCCs

COLLABORATION IS A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL AND WELL-DEFINED RELATIONSHIP ENTERED BY ORGANIZATIONS TO ACHIEVE COMMON GOALS. THE RELATIONSHIP INCLUDES A COMMITMENT TO:

- A DEFINITION OF MUTUAL RELATIONSHIPS AND GOALS;
- A JOINTLY DEVELOPED STRUCTURE AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY;
- MUTUAL AUTHORITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SUCCESS; AND
- SHARING OF RESOURCES AND REWARDS.

## Collaboration

CJCCs offer a way for criminal justice system practitioners and advocates in the community to collaborate on county issues. For example, court budgets are often developed without proper consideration of how other agencies will be affected.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, limited funds may not be used to the greatest advantage. More effective resource allocation, as well as more cooperative agencies and more transparency, can help improve public opinion and trust in the justice system.<sup>25</sup>

Source: Mattessich & Monsey, 1992<sup>26</sup>

## Problem-Solving

Problem-solving justice features criminal justice systems working on understanding their local criminal justice issues to promote the most effective prevention and intervention on all types of crimes and offenders.<sup>27</sup> Principles of problem-solving justice include enhanced information to improve justice decision-making, community engagement, collaboration, individualized justice, and offender accountability. Problem-solving justice addresses crime but also collectively attempts to prevent crime, improve public confidence in justice, and reduce recidivism. For

<sup>2</sup> See <https://bit.ly/2zW3AXp>

example, the Evidence-Based Policing Matrix produced by the George Mason University Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy<sup>3</sup> suggests collaborative, problem-solving justice initiatives are more likely to be successful than those that are not collaborative.<sup>28</sup> CJCCs promote problem-solving justice in which criminal justice system players to respond more creatively to local crime.<sup>29</sup>

## System-Change

Agency coordination through CJCCS can lead to system-wide impact, such as how resources are allocated and initiatives developed.<sup>30</sup> Resource scarcity makes it necessary for organizations in in the social, governmental, and business sectors to work together. In addition, CJCCs meet to understand current evidence-based practices in their local criminal justice system, as well as support the implementation of additional practices.

## Cost-Savings

CJCC stakeholders work across agencies and jurisdiction to find the drivers of criminal justice cost and investigate cost-effective alternatives.<sup>31</sup> Given the size of local justice agencies, CJCCs can create long-term cost saving plan that compensates for the initial high investment of members' time for coordination and set-up.<sup>32</sup>

During initial stages of formation, CJCCs should ask the following questions to aid in planning.

- ***Where are we now?*** CJCCs assess current policies, practices, and programs and how they have changed over time.
- ***Where do we want to be in the future?*** CJCCs creates a vision of success for the criminal justice system.
- ***How do we get from here to there?*** CJCCs plan and implement strategies for change.

Source: McGarry & Ney, 2006<sup>33</sup>

## Best Practices of CJCCs

Based on discussions with criminal justice coordinating council chairs and directors, Wickman and colleagues identified key components of effective and long-lasting CJCCs.<sup>34</sup> These components include:

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://cebcp.org/>

- **Clearly stated mission** and role to increase the CJCC's legitimacy and enable the CJCC to address criminal justice system data collection, analysis, and planning.
- **A council structure**, particularly as it relates to the CJCC's membership, general governmental relationship, and policies and procedures for council operations and organization. This includes a holistic, systemic approach to membership (elected/appointed officials, community members, and other criminal justice agency representatives and leaders), with a close, yet independent, link to county or city government.
- **Quality staff** that are trained, experienced, and have appropriate political, managerial, and administrative skills to support planning and policy development.<sup>35</sup>
- **Data sharing, collection, and analysis** on system operations to help fully assess system-wide performance.
- **Promotion of evidence-based practices** into ongoing system-wide operations, including quality assurance measures for implementation and sustainability. Most challenging for CJCCs is identifying evidence-based practices and current programs that may need revising, taking steps to make these revisions or seek alternatives, and start systematic action planning.
- **Plans for system operations in case of an emergency** such as floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards, riots, flu pandemics, and bomb threats.
- **Fair budget and resource appropriation** made collectively in a neutral and credible manner to obtain system improvement goals.<sup>36</sup>

The following features foster an environment that helps initiate and sustain change:<sup>37</sup>

- Sharing the power of decision-making within the CJCC.<sup>38</sup>
- Flexibility in determining the scope of CJCC work.<sup>39</sup>
- Providing equal distribution of rewards and benefits among members.<sup>40</sup>
- Incorporating highly skilled members.<sup>41</sup>
- Emphasizing quality, rather than quantity, of efforts.<sup>42</sup>

### Measuring Performance

Little research exists on how CJCCs affect criminal justice outcomes.<sup>43</sup> Research is needed to examine the impact of collaboration on the criminal justice system. What limited research that does exist has examined how CJCCs operate and components of effective CJCCs.<sup>44</sup> Researchers identified several studies, all focusing on coordinating councils that handle one criminal justice issue, either domestic violence or family violence.<sup>45</sup> CJCC members and staff, potentially in collaboration with a university or government researcher, can conduct needs assessments, establish criterion for success, and evaluate processes, outcomes, and cost-benefits.<sup>46</sup> CJCCs should gauge performance based on quantifiable measures, such as the number of grant applications submitted or awarded, as well as system intervention outcomes and criminal justice system cost savings.<sup>47</sup> Public opinion also should be considered in evaluating success.<sup>48</sup>

CJCCs are encouraged to consider data systems integration to expedite information exchange on criminal justice clients and allow data collection that would guide CJCC initiatives. Also, having data collected uniformly across the system means that programs can be evaluated with more

certainty and complexity.<sup>49</sup> However, these data systems can be expensive, especially initially. For cash strapped jurisdictions, finding the capital to replace older information system can be prohibitive.

## Conclusion

As the United States General Accounting Office noted,

The criminal justice process—from arrest through correctional supervision—in any jurisdiction is generally complex and typically involves a number of participants including police, prosecutors, defense attorneys, courts, and corrections agencies. Because of the large number of agencies involved, coordination among agencies is necessary for the process to function as efficiently as possible within the requirements of due process. That is, all involved agencies need to work together to ensure proper and efficient system operations, identify any problems that emerge, and decide how best to balance competing interests in resolving these problems.<sup>50</sup>

To prevent and solve local crime problems and justice issues, CJCCs bring together the different players in the criminal justice system and the community. While CJCCS can offer better coordination and problem-solving approaches, commitment and investment is needed from its members. Activities such as agenda setting, establishing staff, and data collection may take time and money.

Administrators should measure program activities toward achieving their set goals, as well as level of collaboration and sustainability.<sup>51</sup> Little is known about outcomes of CJCCs, so more rigorous research is needed. Research on effectiveness of CJCCs and the potential impacts on crime is needed to recognize them as an evidence-based practice.

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