

Building a Business Case for Integration of Criminal Justice Information

Summary of the June 1999 Workshop

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This project was supported by Award No. 1999-LD-VX-K004 funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance,
Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice

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Context & Purpose of the Workshop

The need for a “business case” for criminal justice information integration was raised by state and local justice leaders at a series of Intergovernmental Information Sharing meetings sponsored by the US Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs (OJP) during 1998. During these meetings, representatives from 25 states expressed an urgent need for assistance in developing a clear, consistent, and compelling integration business case, or marketing message, for senior decision-makers. The participants agreed that the business case must inform decision-makers in the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches of the importance of providing leadership, resources, and governance structures that will support the integration and interoperability of state and local justice information systems.

In response to this request, OJP asked the Center for Technology in Government (CTG) of the University at Albany/State University of New York to develop materials for a Business Case for Integration. CTG convened the Business Case Workshop to engage state and local participants from two communities--criminal justice professionals and senior elected and appointed political leaders--in an exploration of benefits, barriers, and strategies that reflect their particular experiences and points of view on integrated justice. The two-day Workshop was designed to encourage better understanding of one another’s perspectives and to search for common ground where a convincing and comprehensive case for integration can be built.

The Workshop participants were asked to (1) refine and expand their understanding of “justice integration” to include both a broad conceptualization and specific needs and conditions that are important to different agencies and jurisdictions, (2) develop ideas for the “content,” or “message,” of the Business Case for Integration, (3) recommend ways to successfully communicate the business case message to senior decision-makers from the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches of government.

Participants & Activities

The 54 workshop participants (listed at the end of this summary) included both criminal justice professionals and political leaders from 24 states and localities, Department of Justice officials, and representatives from the private and nonprofit sectors with particular interests in issues of public safety.

During the workshop, participants engaged in a series of focused discussions about the benefits of criminal justice system integration, the barriers to achieving it, and ways to overcome those barriers. A Socratic panel of political leaders discussed approaches and strategies for securing their attention and support for new initiatives. Presentations on the marketing ideas, privacy issues, and integration efforts in two other policy areas--environmental quality and growth management--were given by experts in these fields. The group also heard a preliminary report of a reconnaissance study conducted by CTG researchers in preparation for the workshop which looked at a number of ongoing integration efforts in some depth and across time. Finally, participants created the basics of a business case for a hypothetical situation and extracted from that experience a set of recommendations for guidelines and other material that would help them make their own cases to various audiences in the future. These recommendations are the foundation for work now underway at CTG to produce practical business case materials for criminal justice professionals that are adaptable to specific state, local, or regional conditions. These products will be drafted during Summer 1999 and refined through a process that will involve the workshop participants as expert reviewers.

Themes

The discussions were marked by enthusiasm and engagement. Despite the variety of jurisdictions and professional specialties represented among the participants, four themes consistently emerged from the plenary and small group sessions:

The goals or objectives of criminal justice information integration (CJI) are remarkably consistent from place to place, but the environments in which they are sought differ widely. In an opening survey, participants ranked 12 commonly stated benefits of integration. Survey results showed that several benefits consistently showed up at or near the top of the list, regardless of the level or branch of government of the respondents:

- Accuracy, completeness, and reliability of information for immediate decisions and actions was ranked in the top three for every group.
- Coordinated action among organizations or across different levels of government was generally ranked first or second.

Other consistently high-ranking benefits included:

- Efficiency of operations thanks to information that is collected once and used repeatedly.
- Timeliness of action because information is available when and where it is needed.
- Participation by all players in decisions about the nature, scope, and limits of integrated information.
- Consistent definition of information from one organization to another.

Despite the strong agreement about the key benefits, the participants articulated important differences in their political cultures, organizational structures and traditions, methods of governance and coordination, bases for leadership, experience with integration efforts, and

sources of funding and other resources. These differences made it clear that no single business case would be suitable in every, or even many, situations. Instead, criminal justice officials need source material, guidelines, and access to assistance that will help them build the specific case that is relevant and persuasive in their own settings.

Although general goals are shared, there are important differences in emphasis among the levels and branches of government and among the types of agencies involved.

While every level of government is involved in integration efforts, the greatest effect and the greatest degree of change is at the local level, where most justice operations take place. Local officials have a special concern for information that supports safe, correct, and immediate action. They also want full participation in the planning and decision making that defines the nature, scope, and limits of integrated information. By contrast state and federal officials place special emphasis on supporting integrated information through integrated funding strategies and better IT infrastructure, planning, and standards. Legislative concerns often turned on responsiveness to public needs and on the trade-offs between investments in justice systems and other pressing public problems. They are very concerned with, and seldom satisfied with the answers to, questions about cost and performance. Judicial representatives emphasized coordination and concern that attention to crime-fighting not overshadow the civil rights of citizens and defendants.

There is strong agreement that the collective benefits of CJI must be accompanied by benefits that are meaningful to each specific stakeholder.

While the survey results focused on the collective, or “greater good,” benefits of integration, the small group discussions revealed the specific interests of key stakeholders. For example, police agencies seek improved safety for officers that is made possible by accurate and timely information before arrests. Court administrators, judges, attorneys, and their clients will benefit from accurate and consistently used court calendars that bring needed people and evidence together at the right time, the first time. Local elected officials who support integration efforts look for benefits in terms of quality of life improvements for neighborhoods, savings of public funds, opportunities for political leadership, and so on.

Barriers to CJI are both tangible and intangible.

Important barriers stand in the way of CJI. Some barriers are readily observable and measurable. These are the barriers that are most amenable to direct attack, whether through planning, education, research, or better targeted investments. These barriers include:

- Funding that is both limited and divided among separate programs.
- A variety of legitimate, but sometimes conflicting, organizational missions.
- Lack of the consensus-building and communication skills necessary to successfully carry out an integration effort.
- Lack of knowledge and understanding about the dimensions and processes of integration.
- Threats to personal privacy.
- Inadequate IT planning processes, technical infrastructure, and standards.
- Absence of a common planning process among criminal justice agencies.

Other, equally important barriers are more difficult to address because their dimensions are shaped more by perception, emotion, history, and tradition.

- Lack of leadership and scarcity of champions.
- Lack of vision or willingness to redefine the business of public safety as something more comprehensive than each of its parts.
- Turf issues, including lack of trust, refusal to cooperate, and fear of accountability.

The workshop participants identified scores of actions and strategies to begin to overcome both kinds of barriers. These included public education campaigns that involve community members as well as justice professionals; new organizational structures designed expressly to support and guide integration efforts; funding tied to joint planning, the pursuit of integration objectives, and achievement of milestones; fewer strings on funding that already exists; realistic demonstrations of how integrated information will be used; and identification and emulation of effective collaboration strategies used elsewhere in both the public and private sectors.

Key Strategies for Building Support for Criminal Justice Integration

By working through a case study in which a multi-county region attempts to launch an integration effort, the workshop participants developed a wide variety of actions organized around the expected concerns of different stakeholders: city officials, county officials, the state legislature, the courts, and the news media. These separate discussions revealed a set of strategies for constructing, conveying, and building support for criminal justice integration.

- ***Find and cultivate a champion.*** Politically savvy, well-informed leadership is crucial to launching and sustaining an integration effort.
- ***Understand the needs and motivations of multiple audiences.*** There are a variety of stakeholders in the CJI enterprise. Their concerns and expectations will differ and need to be well-understood and acknowledged.
- ***Educate them about issues, benefits to them, needed investments, and likely problems.*** Stakeholder concerns must be addressed in ways that are relevant to them and must include information about issues, risks, and costs, as well as benefits.
- ***Be honest about how far it is from 'here' to 'there.'*** In many places, the public and the elected officials believe criminal justice is far more streamlined, coordinated, and integrated than it actually is in practice. In order to get their support for a significant, long-term effort, they need to understand the size, scope, and length of the effort. They also need a very clear picture of the desired future state, again in terms that are relevant to the audience.
- ***Be prepared to answer the hard questions of cost and performance.*** Any legislator can be counted on to ask, "How much will this cost and where will the money come from?" Milestones of achievement and measures of improved performance or productivity will also be necessary.
- ***Find ways to leverage related activities, investments, and events.*** For elected officials, investments that pay off in more than one way can be more attractive than single-purpose spending. For example, investments in geographic information can often bring economic development, public works, and environmental quality dividends along with better

information to support public safety. Often a precipitating event which focus public attention on the problems of inadequate information can be used to initiate or revitalize an integration effort.

- ***Benchmark your situation against others who are doing better.*** Integration efforts have been underway in many places for more than two decades. Any program can learn from those in the lead and those with more experience.
- ***Many approaches can work.*** Integration efforts already under way around the country amply demonstrate that there is no one best way to work. Some efforts are comprehensive in scope and involvement from the start. Others build on separate efforts that started independently. Still others take an incremental approach, starting with the most urgent problem, or the most tractable one, or some other logical starting point, and build from there.

Next Steps

At the conclusion of the Workshop, the participants identified and prioritized the kinds of information and assistance they would like to find in a “business case preparation kit.” They included examples, stories, and case histories; frequently asked questions with answers and counter-arguments; lists of typical stakeholders and constituencies and ways to gather and build consensus; a press kit including talking points, model press releases, and typical press contacts; examples of governance structures and processes; sample performance measures; a glossary of important or commonly misunderstood terms; grant and revenue strategies; cost-benefit examples; and interactive or video materials to support planning and education; a variety of references and pointers to other resources. These ideas will guide CTG in developing a guide for preparing a business case suited to specific audiences in a specific situation.

The guide and other materials will be drafted and shared with workshop participants and other experts for review and then finalized and delivered to OJP for production and distribution during the second half of 1999.

Attachments

- Workshop Agenda
- Workshop Participants

Prepared by the Center for Technology in Government, University at Albany, SUNY, July 1999.
Workshop materials can be found at http://www.ctg.albany.edu/projects/doj/doj_workshop1.html