



# A Framework for Evidence-Based Decision Making in Local Criminal Justice Systems

## Starter Kit

### 2a: Engaging and Ready Staff for Change

#### Navigating the Roadmap

Activity 2: Build individual agencies that are collaborative and in a state of readiness for change.

#### Introduction

For evidence-based decision making to achieve its optimum effect, it must occur consistently within individual agencies and across the criminal justice system. That is, the reliance on evidence to inform decision making should occur at the system level (the work the collaborative policy team is undertaking), at the agency level, and at the case level. This agency and case level “alignment” requires a specific focus on the individual agencies and the professionals within them. In the case of many agencies, it will likely involve

- reevaluating the agency’s mission, goals, and values to determine the degree to which they align with and support the policy team’s system-wide vision;
- reconsidering agency policy and practice in light of evidence-based knowledge;
- retooling organizational culture, structure, and agency policy and practice where needed; and
- providing new knowledge and skills for staff.

Staff engagement will be critical to making these efforts possible.

#### Purpose

To provide opportunities for professionals across the criminal justice system to become actively engaged in the process of building a criminal justice system that employs evidence-based decision making

#### Participants

All policy team members should be involved in engaging their agency’s staff in this work. How the work is conducted in each agency may vary, depending upon the size, structure and culture of the organization, as well as the extent to which evidence-based decision making has already been incorporated.

#### Instructions

1. Devote a policy team meeting to the topic of engaging and readying staff for change. Review, and then consider, the relative merits of the strategies offered in the “Tips” section of this document. Keep in mind that some ideas will have merit across all agencies, some will make sense for only one or a few agencies, and some will not serve any agencies well.

2. As a team, generate a list of additional strategies for engaging and readying staff for change. Assess the merits of these additional ideas. For each strategy that has merit, develop an action plan that considers the involvement of
  - a. all agencies (those strategies that can be employed on a systemwide basis);
  - b. a cluster of agencies; or
  - c. single agencies.

Consider establishing work groups that draw upon the talents of agency staff to carry out these action plans. This both expands the capacity of the policy team to accomplish work and builds agency staff engagement.

3. Be sure that action plans include methods to monitor progress and assess the impact of the action plan. For instance, action plans might include routine report-backs to the policy team on activities and results. Action plans might also include objective measures to assess change over time. For instance, a simple ten-question survey administered to all agency staff at the beginning of the effort is an efficient way to capture baseline information. Repeating the survey at a later point in time will provide information about the effectiveness of the strategies adopted. The survey can be found in the Appendix. Alternatively, use the survey as a set of prompting discussion questions at an informal, “brown bag” lunch session.

### Tips

The following are some possible strategies for engaging staff and readying them for potential changes that will result from involvement in the EBDM initiative:

- Establish a county-wide web page to share information. Possible content includes information about the national EBDM initiative, the county’s involvement in the initiative (e.g., team members, action plan), and research findings.
- Create a newsletter (electronic or paper) to share the kind of information described above.
- Create research briefs that highlight specific empirical findings and their relevance to the county’s justice system.
- Convene cross-disciplinary briefings to increase agencies’ knowledge about mission, roles, responsibilities, and activities to enhance understanding and foster new or improved working relationships.
- Convene brown bag lunches within or across agencies to build stronger working alliances—particularly interdisciplinary alliances.
- Circulate research articles and seek reaction and input from staff about their findings, the extent to which local policies and practices reflect these findings, and/or ideas about how to advance current practice using these research findings.
- Administer surveys to staff to gauge their level of knowledge about particular matters and/or to seek their ideas, involvement, and input.

### Outreach Efforts

In Mesa County, Colorado, the policy team chair developed a standard presentation on EBDM and the policy team’s work, which she gave at “brown bag lunches” in different agencies to begin to build more interest in the Initiative.

- Meaningfully engage mid-level supervisors by asking them to lead certain portions of the agency's EBDM efforts (e.g., convene a meeting of staff to examine the agency's current mission statement and evaluate the extent to which it is consistent with the policy team's vision for the local justice system; recommend modifications to the mission statement as appropriate; identify specific ways the agency's work supports the system-wide vision; engage supervisors in the policy and practice analysis process; engage supervisors in the process of assessing line staff knowledge and skills around the core competencies of correctional practice).
- Convene ad hoc work groups (within or across agencies; of mixed or same level of authority) to take on specific pieces of work in support of the policy team's action plan.
- Conduct briefings at staff meetings to share and dialogue about research findings, the EBDM initiative, and/or case study materials from colleague communities that have had success in risk and harm reduction efforts.
- Hold brainstorming or focus group sessions to explore discreet ideas or problems (e.g., Which harm reduction measures should our community strive for? How might community members be more substantively educated about matters related to the justice system? How might certain kinds of information be shared with other system actors more effectively in the future?).
- Prepare communications materials (e.g., vision statements, statement of values, research findings, etc.) and post visibly in agency lobbies, meeting rooms, and staff offices. Create a local "identity" related to the EBDM work.

**Example:** Ramsey County, Minnesota, EBDM Awareness Event

On March 9, 2011, the Ramsey County, Minnesota, EBDM policy team hosted a half-day awareness event. The primary goal of the event was to raise awareness of the EBDM initiative among key stakeholders and their staff. More than 200 people attended the event from all levels of key agencies, including law enforcement, corrections, courts, public defender, city and county prosecution, county commission, and state criminal justice agencies. National experts Mark Carey and Frank Domurad, from The Carey Group, were faculty for the event; they presented information about the Framework and the rationale for it, as well as key principles of evidence-based practices.

Prior to the event, the Ramsey County EBDM Education Subcommittee took on the charge of identifying those to be invited, sending out "hold the date" announcements, certifying the event for Continuing Education Units (CEU), developing the goals and agenda, identifying faculty, and taking care of all the detailed planning and logistics for the event. EBDM staff also developed press releases and made sure that media were aware of the event. The event began mid-day with a luncheon, followed by a three-hour training session. The EBDM team's map was blown up to wall size and prominently displayed in the meeting room as well as the "One Less..." logos. EBDM policy team members were on hand to answer any questions about the map and initiative. A Ramsey County EBDM brochure and EBP resource listing was provided to all those who attended.

During the event, participants were asked to complete a pre- and post-test to gauge their level of awareness and understanding of the EBDM initiative and the principles of evidence-based practices. The pre- and post-test were developed based on the awareness survey in the Starter Kit, and were tailored to their needs:

- Prior to the event, 40% of participants said they were clear about (aware of) the EBDM initiative; after the event, 79% said they were clear about the initiative.
- Prior to the event, only 28% of participants said they were very knowledgeable about evidence-based practices; after the event, 67% said they were very knowledgeable about evidence-based practices.

The event was well received by those in attendance and achieved the goals envisioned by the EBDM policy team. And as a result of the event, several participants signed up to receive regular updates about the project and volunteered to participate on various subcommittees. The EBDM policy team agreed to consider conducting a similar event later on in the effort to announce their implementation plan and to continue to gain the support and participation of all the agencies involved.

**Example:** Charlottesville-Albemarle County, Virginia, Staff Engagement Strategy

### **Engaging Our Staff in the EBDM Initiative**

Our overall goal is to engage the staff of the policy team members in the process of evidence-based decision making. The following is the proposed process for educating and engaging the staff:

1. Set up meetings at each agency during a regularly scheduled staff meeting or a special staff meeting, with the purpose of addressing the EBDM process.
2. Provide a one-pager on the EBDM initiative to the staff when inviting them to the meeting. Ask that they read the information and come to the meeting with ideas about what harm reduction means to them and what activities the policy team should adopt to address the areas of greatest concern.
3. Invite someone from another discipline to present with you to show that this is a justice community initiative that all of us are participating in. It is important to demonstrate the collaboration around this process.

Present the PowerPoint describing the Initiative in more detail. Engage staff in a discussion about how you, as a team, are attempting to make key decisions around evidence and research. Then

- a. share the mapping process, vision statement, decision point, etc.
- b. share the action items you are considering for the implementation phase;
- c. ask the staff for their input on the action items;
- d. ask them what evidence or research would help them do their job better;  
and

- e. ask them what they would propose if they could influence what the policy team was considering.

Documents to have at the session include

- copies of the PowerPoint presentation;
- one-page EBDM initiative summaries;
- the vision poster (perhaps laminated...although this would not be a handout);
- the One Less stakeholder brochures; and
- top priorities, proposed activities/research items, and harm reduction measures that the policy team has tentatively selected.

## Appendix: Sample Survey on Staff Knowledge of and Interest in the EBDM Initiative

Our county is one of many communities across the country participating in the Evidence-Based Decision Making in Local Criminal Justice Systems Initiative. Please take a few minutes to answer the following eight questions regarding our county's participation in this effort.

1. Before receiving this survey, were you aware that our county was involved in this initiative?
  - a. Yes, well aware
  - b. Yes, vaguely aware
  - c. No, not aware
  
2. Have you seen any written information about this initiative (e.g., handouts, newsletters, memos, web pages)?
  - a. Yes, I've seen a fair amount of written information about this initiative
  - b. Yes, I've seen some written information about this initiative
  - c. No, I have not seen any written information about this initiative
  
3. To what extent do you feel you understand the purpose of this initiative and some of its potential outcomes?
  - a. I feel clear about the purpose and potential outcomes of our participation in this initiative.
  - b. I have a vague idea about the purpose and potential outcomes of our participation in this initiative.
  - c. I feel unclear about the purpose and potential outcomes of our participation in this initiative.
  
4. To what extent do you feel you would like more information about this initiative?
  - a. I would like more information about this initiative and our county and agency's involvement in it.
  - b. I do not need more information about this initiative and our involvement in it.
  
5. If you indicated in Question 4 that you would like additional information, through what means would you most prefer this information?
  - a. Written information (e.g., memo, newsletter, or documents)
  - b. Staff meeting
  - c. Conversation with supervisor
  - d. Observe a policy team meeting
  - e. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. To what extent do you feel involved in this initiative?
  - a. I feel very involved in this initiative.
  - b. I feel somewhat involved in this initiative.
  - c. I do not feel involved in this Initiative.

7. To what extent would you like to be involved?
  - a. I would like to be more involved in this initiative.
  - b. I feel sufficiently involved in this initiative.
  - c. I do not want to be involved in this initiative.
  
8. If you answered in Question 6 that you feel very or somewhat involved in this initiative, please indicate the ways in which you feel involved. (Multiple responses are possible.)
  - a. I have read materials about this initiative.
  - b. I have attended meetings of those leading this initiative in our county.
  - c. I have been briefed by individuals involved in leading this initiative in our county.
  - d. I have been asked to play a role in this initiative by participating in meetings, discussions, and/or work groups.
  - e. I have been asked to provide input into this initiative by providing information and/or ideas.
  - f. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
9. If you answered in Question 7 that you would like to be more involved, in what ways would you like to be more involved?
  - a. I would like to read materials about this initiative.
  - b. I would like to attend meetings of those leading this initiative in our county.
  - c. I would like to be briefed by individuals involved in leading this initiative in our county.
  - d. I would like to play a role in this initiative by participating in meetings, discussions, and/or work groups.
  - e. I would like to provide input into this initiative by providing information and/or ideas.
  - f. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
10. Please provide any additional information you would like us to know as it relates to this initiative.