



Bulletin

Community Prosecution Strategies: Measuring Impact

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Community prosecution initiatives put into practice the belief that crime problems are best prevented and solved when community members work with prosecutors and the police. As the community prosecution movement grows, it is critical that communities develop the capacity to measure the impact of these programs. This Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) bulletin, which is organized by seven key dimensions shared by community prosecution efforts nationwide,

reviews what we have learned about evaluating community prosecution sites.



Generally, community prosecution initiatives deploy prosecutors or, in some jurisdictions, nonlegal staff in the community to identify the public safety concerns of residents

and to seek their participation in developing and implementing strategies to address the problems that are the community's highest priorities. Community prosecution represents a distinct departure from the case and conviction orientation of traditional prosecution. Instead, community prosecution seeks ways to prevent and reduce crime through initiatives that range from cleaning up and maintaining public parks to using civil sanctions to attack nuisance crime.

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History of Community Prosecution

The immediate origins of the community prosecution movement are often traced to the pioneering efforts of Multnomah County District Attorney (DA) Michael Schruck, who established the Neighborhood DA Unit in Portland, Oregon, in 1990 in response to business leaders' concerns that quality-of-life crimes would impede development of a central business district.¹ In 1991, community-oriented prosecution initiatives in Kings County, New York, under District Attorney Charles J. Hynes and in Montgomery County, Maryland, under State's Attorney Andrew Sonner involved reorganization of the prosecutors' offices along geographic lines and efforts to form new working relationships with their communities.

After the early 1990s, community prosecution spread rapidly to other jurisdictions. Estimates of how many prosecutors' offices in the United States have adopted community prosecution strategies vary. The American Prosecutors Research Institute (APRI) recently estimated, based on a national survey of prosecutors' offices, that by the end of 2000 nearly half of all prosecutors' offices may have been engaged in activities that would qualify as community prosecution.² In 1999, 33 sites received targeted federal funding to support community prosecution strategies; in 2000, 62 sites received grants to plan or implement new programs, or to expand or enhance existing programs; and in late 2001, 75 additional sites received funding to plan, implement, or enhance community prosecution programs.

Nine sites received leadership awards in 2001. These nine sites will serve as learning laboratories for other communities looking to implement similar strategies. Table 1 lists 38 community prosecution initiatives in operation at the end of 2000.

Key Dimensions

Like other community justice innovations, community prosecution strategies vary according to the needs and

Table 1. Chronology of Community Prosecution Initiatives

Manhattan, NY	1985	Honolulu, HI	1997
Portland, OR	1990	Jackson County, MO	1997
Kings County, NY	1991	San Diego, CA (City Attorney)	1997
Montgomery County, MD	1991	Kalamazoo County, MI (CLOCK)	1998
Middlesex County, MA	1991	Cook County, IL	1998
Philadelphia, PA (LINE)	1991	Nassau County, NY	1998
Marion County, IN	1993	Knox County, TN	1998
Suffolk County, MA	1993	Travis County, TX	1999
Los Angeles, CA (SAGE)	1993	West Palm Beach, FL	1999
Seattle, WA (City Attorney)	1995	Hennepin County, MN	1999
Los Angeles, CA (CLEAR)	1996	Seminole County, FL	1999
Howard County, MD	1996	Cuyahoga County, OH	1999
Brockton County, MA	1996	Virginia Beach, VA	2000
Washington, DC (U.S. Attorney)	1996	Sacramento County, CA	2000
Denver, CO	1996	St. Joseph's County, IN	2000
Erie County, NY	1996	Placer County, CA	2000
Phoenix, AZ (City Prosecutor)	1996	Westchester County, NY	2000
Santa Clara, CA	1996–97	Oakland, CA (City Attorney)	2000
Pima County, AZ	1997	Lackawanna County, PA	2000

circumstances of each locality, but they share underlying features. Seven key dimensions characterize community prosecution initiatives. These dimensions are 1) the target problems, 2) the geographic target area, 3) the role of the community, 4) the content of the response to community problems, 5) organizational changes within the prosecutor's office, 6) case processing adaptations, and 7) interagency collaboration and partnerships relating to the initiative. Drawing on the 38 identified community prosecution programs, table 2 illustrates the diversity of problems confronted by community prosecution and the variety of strategies programs use to address these problems.

Target Problems

Most community prosecution initiatives have been developed in response to crime problems that affect particular neighborhoods or other geographic areas. Nine of the sites studied devote substantial resources to juvenile issues. For example, Michigan's Kalamazoo County Neighborhood Prosecuting Attorney Program focuses on truancy and curfew violations. Its Center for Leadership Options for Community Kids (CLOCK), created in 1999 and operated by the Boys & Girls Club, offers a diversion program for youth who violate state curfew laws or are repeatedly truant (youth who decline to participate are sent to juvenile court). Participants are assessed for

personal, school, family, and employment issues and referred to appropriate agencies for help. They learn leadership skills and engage in positive activities. Youth who complete the diversion program avoid formal involvement with the juvenile justice system.

Prostitution, historically a low priority for the criminal justice system, is a focus of community prosecution in Honolulu, Hawaii, because it is detrimental to tourism. Community prosecutors created a prostitution abatement task force, which filed a nuisance abatement action to ban

Table 2. Key Dimensions of Community Prosecution Strategies

Key Dimensions	Examples From the Sites
1. Target Problems/Goals	Quality-of-life offenses. Drug crime. Gang violence. Violent crime. Juvenile crime. Truancy. Prostitution. Housing and environmental issues. Landlord/tenant issues. Failure of the justice system to address community needs. Community alienation from prosecutor and other justice agencies. Improved cooperation of victims/witnesses. Improved intelligence gathering for prosecution of serious cases.
2. Target Area	Urban/inner city. Rural/suburban. Business districts. Residential neighborhoods.
3. Role of the Community	Recipient of prosecutor services. Advisory. Core participants in problem solving. Core participants in implementation. Community justice panels. Sanctioning panels. Ad hoc. Targeted.
4. Content of Response to Community Problems	Facilitating community self-help. Crime prevention efforts. Prosecuting cases of interest to the community. Receiving noncriminal as well as criminal complaints.
5. Organizational Adaptations/Emphasis	Field offices staffed by attorneys. Field offices staffed by nonattorneys. Attorneys assigned to neighborhoods. Special unit or units. Officewide organization around community prosecution model.
6. Case Processing Adaptations	Vertical prosecution. Horizontal prosecution. Community prosecutors do not prosecute cases.
7. Interagency Collaboration/Partnerships	Police. City attorney. Housing authority. Community court/other court. Other justice agencies (probation, pretrial services). Other social services agencies. Other regulatory agencies.

convicted prostitutes from the Waikiki District as a condition of probation, and introduced legislation passed in 1998 to prohibit convicted prostitutes from returning to the district. They also created a 12-week intervention program for women trying to get out of prostitution.³

Target Area

The geographic area served by the community prosecution program influences what resources are needed and what kinds are available. The challenges and logistical options for community prosecution efforts in densely populated inner-city neighborhoods may be quite different from those of smaller suburban or rural jurisdictions.

The Santa Fe, New Mexico, District Attorney's Office targets an area of more than 7,000 square miles that comprises 3 rural counties, a few small towns, and about 125,000 residents. Illegal drugs (particularly heroin) pose a major problem, to the extent that two of the counties are classified as part of a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area. The large area and dispersed population make community outreach one of the great challenges of the program, which is still in an early stage of implementation.

Community prosecution programs define their geographic target areas in various ways. In Washington, D.C., community prosecution zones were matched to police patrol service areas to enhance the ability of prosecutors to serve neighborhoods and work with Metropolitan Police Department community policing teams.⁴ By contrast, the Denver target areas are neighborhoods in which residents often share ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds and are likely to have a sense of common interest—or of “community.”⁵ In Multnomah County, Oregon, prosecutors in the Neighborhood DA Unit are linked to seven defined districts. The East Portland District combines several principal neighborhoods. The Gresham District is a separate city within the county, and the Tri-Met District covers the three-county transit system.⁶



Role of the Community

How community prosecution sites define the community's role and which individuals or groups will represent the community determine the level of community involvement. In some jurisdictions, community activists identify the pressing crime-related problems affecting neighborhoods, but the prosecutor's office orchestrates the response, often with the help of community police or other agencies. In New York, Manhattan, Kings County, and the Bronx have community affairs bureaus headed by nonattorney community organizers who do most of the outreach (in Kings County, attorneys also participate), attending community meetings and talking with neighborhood leaders, residents, and other stakeholders to determine issues and priorities, and linking the community with prosecutors and other agencies to address specific issues.

In other locations, community representatives play a central role in identifying problems, deciding priorities,

assessing needs, and planning strategies to employ the resources that the prosecutor's office can bring to bear. The approach to community prosecution that District Attorney William Ritter has implemented in Denver is distinctive in that the community prosecutors provide legal guidance and assist with access to city and county resources, but the process of identifying and solving problems is largely carried out by and within the community.⁷ Nonattorney community justice advocates from the targeted communities are selected to reach out to the community and facilitate the problem-solving process. In each area, active neighborhood community justice councils of residents, teachers, school administrators, business owners, and faith leaders identify and prioritize problems and meet monthly with community prosecutors and representatives of relevant agencies to educate themselves and to devise strategies for overcoming problems. One benefit of the community justice council approach is that some quality-of-life issues are resolved without formal action by the state or city prosecutor.

We are looking for people with a common vision for neighborhood safety. This is not a popularity contest where the most popular or powerful person wins.

*Susan Motika, Community Justice Unit,
Denver District Attorney's Office*

Response to Community Problems

The nature of the responses to the problems identified varies among community prosecution efforts. Strategies have taken many forms, ranging from targeted prosecution of cases the community is concerned about (e.g., drug dealing, nuisance establishments or properties, illegal vending) to development of community-operated crime prevention or service improvement efforts, such as Indianapolis's Street Level Advocacy Program. When residents of an Indianapolis neighborhood identified open prostitution as a problem, a community representative took an active role in designing the Patronizing Diversion Program, which aims to discourage prostitution by focusing on patrons of prostitutes. First-time offenders can avoid conviction by admitting to the charge, performing

community service, and meeting with a panel of volunteers from the community who confront offenders with the impact of prostitution on their neighborhood. The public nature of this approach—and the face-to-face interaction with residents of the neighborhood—is a powerful deterrent to people who are considering patronizing prostitutes in the area. Examples of many other strategies used in response to community crime problems are discussed in more detail in the full report *Community Prosecution Strategies: Measuring Impact*.⁸

Organizational Adaptations in the Prosecutor's Office

Depending on the size and resources of the prosecutor's office, a community prosecution program may be run by one or two prosecutors, lay employees, or an entire unit of community-oriented prosecutors, investigators, community relations specialists, and clerical staff. Many programs began by addressing single sites and were staffed by one attorney or staff member. The best-known example of this

approach is the Multnomah County District Attorney's Neighborhood DA Unit, which began in 1990 with a single prosecutor posted to Portland's Lloyd District. By 1996, the Neighborhood DA Unit had grown to seven community prosecutors covering almost the entire county.⁹

In Maryland's Howard and Montgomery counties, and in a growing number of other locations, the community prosecution philosophy governs the way business is conducted in the prosecutor's office overall. The emphasis on this new community-based problem-solving philosophy is reflected in the reorganization of some prosecutors' offices along geographic lines and in the perspectives of individual attorneys who view community assignments as part of the career ladder complementing, rather than detracting from, the more traditional assignments and paths to advancement.

Case Processing Adaptations

Methods of prosecuting cases from targeted neighborhoods differ among community prosecution programs. Cases may be referred to the central office, or neighborhood prosecutors may prosecute them “vertically” (the same prosecutor handles the case at every stage). In Kings County, New York, teams of attorneys assigned to each of the borough’s five judicial zones vertically prosecute the cases that originate in their zone.

The Kings County prosecutors are physically located in the central office to handle trial caseloads efficiently; however, they meet regularly with residents and hear concerns about crime and quality-of-life issues. The rationale for this approach is that these attorneys will understand the community context associated with their criminal cases and will develop more productive working relationships with the community and precinct police. The familiarity with the community fostered by vertical prosecution of cases is believed to facilitate the pursuit of community public safety goals, help prosecutors respond to community priorities, and generate neighborhood support in prosecuting criminal cases.

In some community prosecution programs, community prosecutors do not try cases themselves. Instead, community cases are assigned to the trial division for litigation, and community prosecutors act as liaisons between trial attorneys and community residents. This allows community prosecutors to immerse themselves in the community, participate in neighborhood meetings and events, and facilitate problem-solving strategies. In other jurisdictions, community prosecutors carry the same caseloads as other attorneys in the office and must add outreach and problem solving to these responsibilities.

Collaborative Partnerships

Community prosecution strategies often involve efforts that are not strictly or exclusively within the prosecutor’s

domain and may be only tangentially related to criminal justice. Programs vary in how much they participate in interagency planning, enforcement, and service delivery, and in how much they collaborate with other initiatives such as community courts and community policing. In many locations, community prosecution and community policing go hand in hand, encouraged to work collaboratively by federal policy and funding. Police can provide enforcement support and, at times, a degree of

safety in situations that even a seasoned prosecutor may be ill equipped to handle. In turn, community prosecutors can offer the legal expertise and authority to bring creative community policing solutions to fruition.

Some sites have combined community prosecution with community courts. Travis County District Attorney Ronnie Earle has been the force behind various community-based initiatives in Austin, Texas, including a community court, a drug court, and programs to prevent juvenile crime and truancy.

To solve their target problems, community prosecutors often find it helpful to join forces with other agencies, combining resources that community members might otherwise access in a piecemeal manner, if at all. In nuisance abatement efforts, community prosecutors have relied on the civil justice system and housing and licensing agencies. In Philadelphia, the Local Intensive Narcotics Enforcement (LINE) program was piloted in 1991 to prosecute serious drug offenders. When LINE prosecutors learned what most troubled community residents—nuisance bars, neglected properties, crackhouses, houses of prostitution, and “weed stores”—they called on the police; Philadelphia’s departments of law, public health, licenses and inspections, and liquor control enforcement; the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board; and the Philadelphia Legislative Delegation for help. When LINE became the Special Narcotics Prosecution Unit in 1998, its community role was assumed by the District Attorney’s

I got into the community and found out they wanted me to take care of the little things.

Michael Schrunk, Multnomah County District Attorney

Public Nuisance Task Force, which pursued the same nuisance abatement strategies.

Some community prosecution initiatives are purely collaborative, functioning as part of a task force with other agencies. The CLEAR program in Los Angeles, California, was created in 1996 by an interagency gang task force to address the community's gang problems by targeting specific geographic areas or gangs and using suppression, intervention, and prevention tactics. It is a partnership of law enforcement agencies (the police, sheriff, district attorney, city attorney, and probation department), public officials, and community residents.

Future of the Community Prosecution Movement: Evaluating What Works

Is community prosecution working? Measuring the impact of community prosecution in its diverse adaptations begins with understanding what it is and what it proposes to accomplish. The philosophy behind community prosecution is to develop new collaborative relationships in an effort to be more responsive to the crime-related concerns of the community. As an innovation, many of its elements represent notable departures from traditional operations, and prosecutors who lead the efforts and those agencies that fund them need to agree on and implement measures of impact, performance, and cost effectiveness.

The conceptual framework proposed in table 3 for evaluating community prosecution initiatives recognizes the distinct and joint roles played by the prosecutor and the community. Because community prosecution represents an effort to forge a new working relationship between the two, not merely better public relations, the prosecutor and the community must be viewed as both agents and targets of change. Measurements of

performance and impact should factor in the new goals, roles, and desired outcomes for both the prosecutor and the community.

Using the Key Dimensions To Organize Evaluation Questions

The separate and combined roles of the prosecutor and the community in community prosecution strategies may be examined in terms of each of the key dimensions of community prosecution. The descriptive, structural dimensions of the community prosecution model help to establish categories of presumed impact that should be measurable and take into account the parts played by the prosecutor and the community.

Table 3 distinguishes between implementation- and outcome-related objectives because it is difficult to gauge an innovation's impact without measuring the extent to

which planned aspects of the program are in place. Many, if not all, community prosecution programs are young and evolving, and evaluation strategies should consider a program's relative maturity when measuring

results. In short, community prosecution programs should be evaluated based on their achievement of implementation-stage goals first and on measurable results after the planned strategy is successfully implemented.

As an innovation, community prosecution represents elements unique to prosecution and its relationship with the community. It also shares goals, problems, and methods in common with other community justice initiatives such as community policing, community courts, and community probation. Efforts to measure the impact of community prosecution initiatives can both draw on lessons learned in evaluating innovations in related community justice areas and address the unique features of community prosecution.

The prosecutor and the community must be viewed as both agents and targets of change.

Table 3. Implementation and Outcomes of Community Prosecution

Key Dimensions	Prosecution Function	Community Role	Interaction of Both
Target Problems			
Implementation	Types/number of problems identified.	Input in defining problems.	Collaboration in identifying problems.
	Strategies implemented to address problems.	Participation in devising/ implementing strategies.	Collaboration in devising/ implementing strategies.
Outcomes	Outcomes per problem area.	Community improvement. Accountability. Satisfaction with outcomes.	Problems successfully addressed.
Target Area			
Implementation	Services, actions added per geographic area.	Cooperation, assistance.	Defining, agreeing to area.
Outcomes	Improved measures of target problems in geographic area.	Improved working relationship.	
Role of Community			
Implementation	Types/methods/frequency of involvement.	Types/methods/frequency of involvement.	Access to government and policy formulation.
	Problems identified.	Community access.	
	Suggested strategies.	Suggested strategies.	
Outcomes	Improved community links.	Improved community access/participation.	Improved communication on crime/related problems.
	Improved satisfaction.	Improved satisfaction.	Ownership.
	Improved impact on target problems.	Impact on target areas.	
		Improved accountability.	
Content of Response to Community			
Implementation	Specific programs, components, services added.	Specific role (cooperation, participant, recipient).	Project-specific functions.
Outcomes	Impact of specific programs.	Community view of success.	Measure of success, impact.
Organization of Prosecutor's Office			
Implementation	Geographic assignment. Reorganization. New procedures/staff assessment/values. New programs.	Organization, representation. Areas/neighborhoods. Access to prosecutor/other agencies/resources.	New partnerships. Improved prosecution.
Outcomes	Effectiveness, efficiency. Relative costs. Culture change/acceptance. Impact of new procedures. Improved reputation.	Effectiveness of procedures for participation.	New procedures for collaboration.
Case Processing			
Implementation	Content of workday. Community contact/outreach. Identification of problems. Litigation/vertical.		

(continued)

Table 3. Implementation and Outcomes of Community Prosecution (continued)

Key Dimensions	Prosecution Function	Community Role	Interaction of Both
Case Processing(continued)			
Outcomes	Community contacts. Problems identified. Strategies decided. Matters addressed/type. Resolutions/cases/types. Staff satisfaction.		
Collaboration			
Implementation	New working relationships with agencies, organizations. Expanded planning. Added multiagency services.	New overall working relationship.	New planning, problem-solving role.
Outcomes	Impact of collaboration on services and outcomes/problems.		Routine interaction, growth of relationship.

Analysis suggests that an evaluation framework must begin by identifying the key dimensions of the community prosecution approach to frame performance measurement appropriately. The structure of community prosecution strategies presented in table 3 is one such useful framework for evaluation, one that can be refined through feedback from jurisdictions involved in community prosecution and participants in the process. The proliferation and diversity of community prosecution programs underscore the need for rigorous assessment of their impact. Evaluation can provide jurisdictions with data to assess the strengths and weaknesses of various elements and approaches and contribute to the development of best practices for community prosecution initiatives across the nation.

Notes

1. Barbara Boland, 1998.
2. Elaine Nugent and Gerard A. Rainville, 2000.
3. Information from an interview with Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Claire Merry and a report, *Special Report: Community Prosecution Program*, Department of the Prosecuting Attorney, City and County of Honolulu (January 2000).
4. *Community Prosecution Program in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia: Building Better Neighborhoods and Safer Communities*, U.S. Department

of Justice, U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia (Draft, January 2000).

5. Based on visits to two Denver community prosecution sites, Capitol Hill and Globeville.
6. *Neighborhood DA Unit Projects Update*, March 1998, www.multnomah.lib.or.us/da/nbda.html.
7. The description of the process is based on observation of a Capitol Hill Community Justice Council meeting and conversations with members and site officials.
8. John S. Goldkamp et al., 2001.
9. Boland, p. 258.

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R E S O U R C E S

Publications**Community Courts: An Evolving Model**
BJA Monograph. 2000. NCJ 183452

Examines the community court movement and the role of the community court in a community's daily life.

Community Justice Profiles
Center for Court Innovation. 2000. NCJ 182871

Profiles specific elements of four community justice programs: developing new community justice tools (Austin), engaging the community (Denver), building partnerships (Indianapolis), and the dynamics of problem solving (Portland).

Community Justice in Rural America: Four Examples and Four Futures
BJA Monograph. 2001. NCJ 182437

Describes the experiences of four small, rural communities in which community justice is flourishing.

Developing an Evaluation Plan for Community Courts: Assessing the Hartford Community Court Model
BJA Monograph. 2001. NCJ 185689

Discusses the Hartford, Connecticut, adaptations of the Midtown Community Court model and outlines an evaluation plan for assessing the Hartford court's progress and impact.

Responding to the Community: Principles for Planning and Creating a Community Court
BJA Bulletin. 2001. NCJ 185986

Presents common principles for planning and creating community courts, using the Midtown Community Court in New York City as a case study.

Strategies for Prosecution: Red Hook Community Justice Center
Kings County Office of the District Attorney. 2001. NCJ 190645.

Discusses the experiences of the Red Hook Community Justice Center in Brooklyn, New York, as a criminal justice agency and as a vital community resource.

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Web Sites**American Prosecutors Research Institute**
www.ndaa.org/april/programs/community_prosl/index.html

APRI's National Center for Community Prosecution, a partnership with BJA, provides research, training, and technical assistance to prosecutors through workshops, publications, site visits, and consultations.

Center for Court Innovation
www.courtinnovation.org

Provides information on the center's demonstration projects, use of innovative technology, web sites, publications, and technical assistance services.

Community Justice Exchange
www.communityjustice.org

Offers information and assistance to help bring together criminal justice agencies and ordinary citizens to make communities safer. Includes an online library, a national programs database, and sections on best practices, planning, and site visits.

Executive Office for Weed and Seed
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/eows

Provides federal leadership for multiagency strategies to weed out violence and crime in target neighborhoods and seed economic and social revitalization.

Multnomah County District Attorney's Office
www.multnomah.lib.or.us/danbda.html

Chronicles the activities of this pioneering agency's Neighborhood DA Unit in Portland, Oregon. Discusses specific problems and strategies in each district served by the office.

Office of Community Oriented Policing Services
www.usdoj.gov/cops

Promotes and supports strategies to reduce crime through problem-solving tactics and community-police partnerships.

U.S. Conference of Mayors
www.usmayors.org/uscm/best_practices

Compiles communities' best practices in community problem solving.

Vera Institute of Justice
www.vera.org

Offers information and web links on the Vera Institute's demonstration programs and technical assistance projects.



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