

**Office of Justice Programs
Science Advisory Board Meeting
January 10, 2014 Meeting Summary**

Welcome and Administrative Issues

The meeting of the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) Science Advisory Board (SAB) was called to order by Al Blumstein, Chair, at 830 am in the Main Conference Room of the OJP building at 810 7th Street, NW, Washington, DC. Agenda at Appendix A.

Phelan Wyrick, Designated Federal Officer (DFO), reminded participants that the SAB is a federal advisory committee, that this is a public meeting, and that the day's meeting was announced in the Federal Register. Wyrick noted that it had been a full year since the last meeting of the SAB with meetings originally planned for June 2013 and October 2013 canceled due to the federal budget sequester and the federal government lapse in appropriations respectively.

OJP's Continuing Commitment to Science

OJP Assistant Attorney General (AAG) Karol Mason thanked all of the participants and noted that this was her first SAB meeting. She was actively involved in creating the SAB in her prior role as Deputy Associate Attorney General. AAG Mason underscored her strong commitment to advancing science at OJP, noting that science is integral to the work of OJP and it influences policy and programs at the Department of Justice. She emphasized the importance of the SAB, that OJP is looking for real advice and real critique, and that OJP is interested in producing the highest quality science possible.

Science Solicitation Decision Making

Chair, Al Blumstein introduced the session by indicating that the SAB had expressed an interest in getting a better sense for how scientific programs are formulated, how solicitations are developed, and how decisions are made in the process.

Greg Ridgeway, Acting Director of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), began by indicating that the process differs across the three science offices within NIJ. Physical science and technology needs are very much driven by the needs of the field, as identified by a series of technology working groups. The working groups produce reports from which high priority technology needs are derived. Forensic science research at NIJ is driven by the research community. Two solicitations were released focusing on basic research and applied research respectively. Peer review panels helped identify the best of these based primarily on scientific rigor and importance to the field. In social science, NIJ social scientists and leadership have driven priorities. Congress drives research topics through funding decisions, and other agencies (e.g., Office on Violence Against Women) contribute funding for defined research topics.

Alan Leshner commented that NIJ releases a large number of solicitations relative to its funding levels. He recommended broader solicitations that allow for more creativity from the science community. Ridgeway noted that NIJ is exploring the use of “Dear Colleague” letters to focus interest from potential applicants on specific topics within broader solicitations, following the example of the National Science Foundation.

Bill Sabol, Acting Director of the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) spoke next about decision making on solicitations. He described the broad statutory mission of BJS and several types of statistics (e.g., those aimed at measuring crime levels and changes, and those aimed at understanding how organizations like police departments affect outcomes). BJS frequently uses cooperative agreements to fund projects. BJS typically designs solicitations to be specific about what information is desired, but allows applicants to propose methodologies. In selecting priorities, BJS consults with stakeholders, and looks to congressional and administrative priorities. BJS aims to make long term commitments to statistical programs and invests accordingly. Sabol noted current BJS efforts to modernize the nation’s crime statistics as an example.

Sabol shared a number of questions that BJS considers in making investments:

- Is the collection consistent with statutory authority?
- Will data collection benefit a large number of people?
- What is the cost and the likely return on investment?
- Is there a unique federal role?
- Does this collection help define BJS?

Subcommittee member David Finkelhor stated that BJS has not been adequately supported in recent years and asked if there is a way for BJS to better articulate its mission. Sabol noted that funding has been uneven over the years and that BJS needs to make sure that statistics are reported in a way that is accessible, relevant, and easily understood. SAB Chair Blumstein asked about the adequacy of staffing levels. Sabol noted that BJS is authorized for 60 FTE, but down 9-10 statisticians. He cited retirement, attrition, and a hiring freeze as contributing to the gap.

Bob Listenbee, Administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), spoke next about OJJDP’s research agenda. He noted that OJJDP created a research unit in 2013 with three research scientists. OJJDP’s goal is to support scientifically rigorous research; make sure research is aligned with priorities; and partner with other research units across DOJ and in other federal agencies. Research funding is somewhat constrained to topics receiving programmatic funding (e.g., mentoring). More generally, OJJDP reviews current literature to identify gaps, consults with programmatic staff, assessing information from working groups, and consults with the field. Overall, he noted that resources are very limited in terms of both funding and personnel.

Discussion ensued with comments about effective collaboration between OJJDP and NIJ – regular meetings with recognition that there are important similarities and differences between the two. AAG Mason and SAB member Tony Fabelo spoke about expanding diversity of the pool of people who are engaged in science, including peer review.

Listenbee stated that he recognized disparities and aims to fight them. SAB member Mark Lipsey asked about OJJDP collaboration with private foundations. Listenbee indicated that OJJDP does work with foundations, but does not have a lot of funding to bring to those relationships. However, he noted that even without a lot of funding, OJJDP can play an important leadership role. SAB member Ed Mulvey asked if there is a way to disconnect research funding from the specific topics in budget line items. Listenbee noted that OJJDP has submitted such a request to the Office of Management and Budget, but has not yet heard back.

Research Coordinating Council

Greg Ridgeway spoke about the Research Coordinating Council (RCC) created by OJP in response to a recommendation by the SAB. The RCC includes OJP component agencies (i.e., NIJ, BJS, OJJDP, BJA, OVC, OAAG, SMART) as well as the Office on Violence Against Women, the Office on Community Oriented Policing Services, and the National Institute of Corrections. The RCC meets monthly and had met three times at the time of this report. The hopes for the RCC are to: (1) increase the research that is being produced; (2) help identify areas in need of scientific inquiry; (3) exchange information about resources and staff; and (4) avoid redundancy. Bill Sabol and Karol Mason emphasized the importance of information sharing among these agencies. SAB member Alan Leshner suggested another goal for the group – to create proposal formats and templates that would save researchers time in proposal development. He noted that a large portion of researchers’ time is spent on administrative work. Subcommittee member David Finkelhor also suggested that the RCC look at developing “impact factors:” ways of quantifying the impact that research has by the number of times it is cited.

OJJDP Subcommittee Report

Subcommittee Chair, Mark Lipsey summarized subcommittee conversations related to transitions in OJJDP including the development of the new Innovation and Research Division and the appointment of Bob Listenbee as Administrator. Topics of conversation included OJJDP’s leadership role; interplay between staff in this division committed to research, technical assistance, and communication; and coordinating with researchers in the field. There was some discussion about how OJJDP research can help address persistent juvenile justice problems, such as continuing presence of status offenders in the system and disproportionate minority contact with the system. Subcommittee members noted that there is still not a strong empirical base on these issues and insufficient links between research and action.

BJS Subcommittee Report

SAB member Colin Loftin started by highlighting and commending BJS efforts to make information more user-friendly. He also noted an effort by BJS subcommittee members to encourage the American Society of Criminology to provide modest funding for young

scholars to collaborate with BJS. There was an extended exchange about the involvement of BJS in supporting the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA).

As part of PREA, Congress requires BJS to draw a sample of correctional institutions, estimate the numbers of sexual assaults and rapes, and report them at the institutional level. These reports are used to create rankings with negative ramifications and sanctions for the institutions with the worst records. BJS and the BJS subcommittee feels that this activity undermines their role as a statistical agency because they see a conflict between their scientific role and the regulatory “policing” role. SAB member Joy Pollock agreed that a low ranking for an institution could make it more difficult for BJS to collect data from that same institution at a later date. BJS statistician Alan Beck noted that the collection is very expensive (\$10-12 million) and that there are opportunity costs involved in taking this money from other priorities.

SAB member Tony Fabelo noted that the opportunity cost is a policy issue at the legislative level. Then he noted that BJS has done what was asked of them by Congress and has done it well. He described BJS as the “messenger” and noted that this work is policy relevant. He went on to ask why it is a problem if people are using BJS statistics to make policy. Alan Beck reiterated concerns about the “coercive aspects” of the PREA work and suggested that this work crosses the boundaries of a statistical agency.

Beck further described the PREA data collection. He noted that the study is expensive because the sample is huge and BJS has to address issues of validity to ensure that self-reported data are accurate. He feels that they have done the best they can with that, but that vulnerabilities still exist. In the law, there is a line that says BJS must report institutions that come out “hot.” He noted the costs to a statistical agency to point fingers directly, and described it as poisoning the well when trying to collect other data. Beck noted that BJS is interested in seeing a change to the BJS role as reflected in PREA. SAB member Tony Fabelo suggested that BJS take credit for doing a good job and not be concerned about upsetting some people. He further noted that this information is changing policy across the nation.

SAB member Colin Loftin suggested that the SAB make an official statement on the issue of PREA putting BJS in a monitoring role. SAB Chair Blumstein concurred that the assigned role by Congress in PREA gets in the way of the original BJS mission.

AAG Mason noted that the same information will become available on a facility-level through audits that will not involve BJS. SAB member Frank Cullen recommended that the SAB should not take a position on BJS being involved in monitoring. Instead he suggested a position that BJS has its job so now auditing can go on. SAB member Ed Mulvey agreed with Tony Fabelo and Frank Cullen that the SAB should not say there is a monitoring issue if there is regulatory action stemming from the research.

Beck reiterated that the purpose of this collection is to monitor operations, listing and shaming those that turn out poorly; and that is very different from what BJS normally does. Chair Blumstein charged the BJS subcommittee with continuing to mull this topic.

DOJ's Scientific Integrity Policy and Professional Development of OJP Scientists

Greg Ridgeway summarized the DOJ Scientific Integrity Policy with emphasis on Section X that focuses on the professional development of government scientists.

- Integrity and independence
 - Research will use scientific method
 - Hiring and recruiting of scientists will be based on credentials
 - Results will be conveyed accurately
 - Include uncertainty
 - Establish peer review process
- Professional development
 - Scientists must maintain highest levels of competency and credibility
 - Encourage publication in peer reviewed journals
 - Allow them to become editors or board members of journals
 - Allow participation in professional or scholarly groups
 - Allow receipt of honors and rewards

Ridgeway and Bill Sabol described OJP intentions to create a stronger workforce of scientists that are members of their disciplines. They noted that OJP continues to seek approaches for advancing the work of federal scientists while remaining consistent with ethics rules. One aspect of this is to develop protocols for engaging in scientific activities (e.g., serving on an editorial board, as a peer reviewer, etc.) that do not require case-by-case approval at the highest levels.

SAB member Alan Leshner stated that the DOJ policy is the most aggressive he has seen. He applauded the policy, but noted that implementation will be difficult. For example, he stated that government scientists do not have complete academic freedom and that it is important that they stick to the data in disseminating findings. SAB member Tony Fabelo questioned whether there is any formal definition of an OJP scientist. He emphasized the importance of separating project managers from scientists because these are very different types of work. SAB member Joy Pollock recommended creating a code of ethics to avoid pitfalls. She recommended transparency in general and making rules for moving between government scientific roles and academic roles. Subcommittee member Jeff Butts agreed that there should be a clean division between science and non-science staff. Colin Loftin agreed and added that there have to be rules about sharing and using information. He noted competitive aspects of research and underscored that applicant and grantee information must be protected (e.g., a government scientist should not be able to exploit grantee or grant applicant ideas or creativity to carry out their own research).

Demonstration Field Experiments

Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Director Denise O'Donnell described BJA collaboration with NIJ to support demonstration field experiments on parole techniques and project HOPE (that emphasizes swift and certain, but not necessarily severe, sanctions for probationers who violate terms). BJA recognizes that these experimental approaches provide the strongest options for testing promising practices and building new evidence. The collaborative approach allows BJA to be involved in the research design and to support program development and implementation by providing curricula and training tools. For BJA, this is a different way of doing business. They must do more extensive advance planning, maintain very close engagement with participating sites, and produce multiple technical assistance resources. O'Donnell noted that in addition to increasing capacity at the sites, these efforts increase BJA staff capacity.

Some discussion ensued about the design of the HOPE program and evaluation. The cost of the HOPE project was discussed (approximately \$5 million on the sites, \$1.3 million for training and technical assistance, and \$3.5 million for evaluation). SAB members were generally supportive of the approach to testing a scaled up version of a model that has shown promising initial results. SAB member Mark Lipsey noted that results sometimes come out differently for scaled up models.

BJA Subcommittee

BJA Subcommittee Chair Ed Mulvey discussed topics of researcher/practitioner partnerships and methods for improving program implementation. The subcommittee responded to BJA presentations on the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation program and implementation guidelines. BJA is interested in increased communication with the BJA subcommittee.

Other Subcommittee Reports and Discussion

SAB member Tony Fabelo stated that the Evidence Translation Subcommittee has completed its work that largely focused on the development of the CrimeSolutions.gov website. He noted that he is exploring the possibility of refocusing attention to program performance measures.

Alan Leshner reported that the Scientific Integrity subcommittee has not met, but that the discussion today may provide opportunities for the SAB to provide input on the implementation of the DOJ Scientific Integrity Policy. AAG Mason stated that OJP welcomes input from the SAB on what we should be thinking about. Chair Blumstein inquired as to whether there was a role for the SAB beyond making recommendations. He asked if there is a role for the SAB in looking for violations or a remedial process. AAG Mason said that would be an operational role, and the SAB is an advisory function.

Subcommittee member David Finkelhor stated that ethical guidelines should say more about how one handles potential complaints about violations of ethics. What is the

mechanism if things go off track? DFO Phelan Wyrick noted that the mechanism should be within DOJ.

Board Discussion on Adding and Replacing Members

DFO Phelan Wyrick noted that all SAB members were appointed to four-year terms in 2010 that will expire in 2014. OJP will establish a system that will stagger membership terms in the future so that all memberships will not expire at once. Current SAB members will be offered three options: to opt out of continuing on the SAB beyond 2014, to re-up for a 2-year term, or to re-up for a 4-year term. Subcommittee members are different in that they are selected by OJP component heads and Subcommittee Chairs. Their roles are more limited, but also more flexible.

CrimeSolutions.gov Practices Module

DFO Phelan Wyrick reported that the management and operations of the CrimeSolutions.gov website has now been fully transferred from the Office of the Assistant Attorney General to NIJ. The Practices Module provides users with access to evidence about a broader range of activities (practices are more general than specific programs) based on more rigorous analysis (meta-analysis of numerous program evaluations rather than individual program evaluations). There was some discussion of the numbers of profiles on the website, page hits and web metrics, and the pros and cons “crowdsourcing” the website. NIJ Science Advisor Thom Feucht discussed the appeals process that is available to developers or others who feel that the CrimeSolutions.gov review did not get it right.

Closing Remarks

Science Advisory Board members, presenters, and audience members were thanked for their attendance.