

p. 21 X

The National Conference on Criminal Justice Evaluation  
February 22-24, 1977

PANEL 21 - EXPERIENCE WITH BUILDING  
IN-HOUSE EVALUATION CAPABILITIES

X "Evaluation Management and Organizational Strategies"

Presented By  
T. P. Jones  
Assistant Secretary  
Florida Department of Offender Rehabilitation  
904/488-9940

54789  
68165

This paper was developed by the Department's Bureau of Planning, Research & Statistics and reflects previous efforts by the University of South Florida's Center for Evaluation Research.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the late sixties and early seventies, criminal justice agencies began to recognize the need for professional planning capabilities, largely as a result of passage of the Crime Control and Safe Streets Act and the resulting creation of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. In the waning years of this decade we, as members of the criminal justice system, have become aware of another need - the need to be accountable for our programs and practices. Evaluation has come to the forefront in order to meet these needs.

One of the most important components of any operational planning system, such as those now found in a number of criminal justice agencies, is that of evaluation. It is this component which has the responsibility for the overall assessment of program effectiveness and efficiency in terms of productive outcomes versus performance standards. Morally and legally, criminal justice agencies have a responsibility to the public to account for the expenditure of tax dollars. As the national economy has slowed in recent years, public demand for evaluations of existing programs which detail the measurable result of the investment of public monies in agency operations has increased. There is an increasing awareness among professionals in different sectors of the criminal justice system that the traditional intuitive and unsystematic approach to the development and assessment of programs and techniques has led to repetitive error. Further, it has been impossible to pinpoint the reason for success when success did occur.

Criminal Justice agencies are well aware of the need to evaluate, however, these governmental units are faced with a dilemma. Evaluation is generally misunderstood by policy makers, is viewed with suspicion and abused by line management, is threatening to program staff and is a burden for the so called "evaluators" who generally have other primary duties. Evaluation, too frequently, is a thankless task; at best it is damned with faint praise or, at worst, ridiculed, questioned, criticized, second guessed, and held to be invalid. Despite these general constraints, there remains the demand for quantitative assessment of program efficiency and effectiveness.

The state of the art of evaluating governmental functions is so embryonic at this point in time that the correctional administrator is left with very little at his disposal when contemplating evaluation, despite the need for factual knowledge in the efficient and effective management of programs. One of the most salient problems encountered in initiating evaluation efforts is the lack of adequate performance measurements, specifically quantitative qualitative measures of program effectiveness and efficiency.

To compound these problems, classical evaluation methodologies with roots in academic, scientific research are, for the most part, impractical for use by criminal justice agencies on an ongoing basis. For example, the use of control groups can present severe supervision problems as offenders may view one of the groups as receiving "preferential" treatment. The pre-test, post-test methodology is inapplicable in many instances as the segmented organization of the criminal justice system does not always allow access to individuals prior to their becoming the

responsibility of a particular governmental unit. Additionally, such evaluations require a greater expenditure of fiscal, personnel, and time resources than is normally available to criminal justice agencies on a continuing basis.

Task force or investigative reports many times are disguised as evaluations. However, the basis for such undertakings, e.g. immediate discovery and resolution of problems, only increases the threatening nature of the so-called "evaluation" and the data collected is indeed subject to question. Finally, one can be relatively certain that responses to subjective self-evaluations do not come near to meeting the need for unbiased program assessment in this the "Era of Accountability."

Historically, criminal justice agencies have lacked the resources to perform effective program evaluation. Management by crisis, unfortunately the norm rather than the exception in criminal justice administration, works against the acquisition and utilization of such resources. The current trend toward the development of stronger planning and research capabilities though, is beginning to negate the need for this type of management. Thus, the development of an appropriate methodology with which to conduct evaluations can provide contemporary criminal justice administration with the tools for measuring program performance and aid in the effective development and management of criminal justice programs.

## II. THE FLORIDA EXPERIENCE

Given the capabilities, what are the organizational strategies which can be used to provide valid, methodologically sound evaluations which are of interest to and can be used by the administrators, government officials, and legislators who demand accountability? A case in

point is the Florida Department of Offender Rehabilitation which was faced with this very question in the midst of its major reorganization two years ago. While it would have been much easier to spend several years developing an evaluation strategy, legally there was no alternative. The 1975 Florida legislature mandated annual program evaluation by the Department of Offender Rehabilitation in Section 20.312 (21) Florida Statutes which states:

"A comprehensive program evaluation system shall be established which shall encompass all major programs of the department. The department shall establish measurable program objectives and performance criteria for each program it operates. The system of evaluation to be established shall require all programs to develop measurable goals and to estimate the cost of attaining the goals in advance. Studies of relative cost and effectiveness of departmental and alternative programs shall be conducted. The department shall develop a program evaluation schedule and shall evaluate at least 20 percent of its programs annually. The department shall submit these evaluation schedules and reports to the appropriate substantive committees of both houses of the legislature for review. Where possible, the department management information system shall provide the basic information for program evaluation studies for the department and the Parole and Probation Commission."

Although the legislative mandate required immediate action, the Florida Department of Offender Rehabilitation was not without some experience in the design and utilization of evaluations. The evaluation requirement, in Florida and elsewhere, has its roots at a time when an ever growing correctional system, generated by an unprecedented influx in inmate population, made it necessary to organize and establish a comprehensive planning system to cope with the growth problems.

The addition of a planning section to Florida corrections in 1973 provided sufficient talent and depth to compile valid data, to assess current needs and deficiencies, to identify parameters and constraints, to establish realistic goals, to set standards, and in general to

formulate plans according to prescribed ground rules. However, the absence of an evaluation capability was recognized.

The Florida Department of Offender Rehabilitation has long been a proponent of strong evaluation. Accordingly, in Fiscal year 1973-1974 the Department acquired a grant from the Board of Regents to contract with the University of South Florida for a preliminary report containing the basic guidelines for developing comprehensive models for evaluation of programs in corrections.

The compelling need to expand these guidelines into a theoretical framework and practical methodology for assessing program effectiveness prompted the continuation of Board of Regents funding in Fiscal Year 1974-1975. The resultant model for the evaluation of correctional programs was utilized to a great extent in the design of the comprehensive evaluation system described below. However, as the evaluation model did not totally accommodate the legislative mandate, it was necessary to synthesize the professional guidance with the realities of the day to day operation of a growing correctional system in order to design an evaluation system appropriate for the Florida Department of Offender Rehabilitation. The remainder of this paper, then, will explore these efforts in terms of strategies employed, problems encountered, and the successes achieved in establishing a comprehensive evaluation system for Florida corrections.

Briefly, these efforts succeeded in countering field resistance to intrusion by "ivory tower" evaluators, met the information needs of program managers and departmental administrators, met the statutory requirement to evaluate, and were accomplished within limited time frames and limited resources of the department. The results of the

evaluation efforts of the Florida Department of Offender Rehabilitation were generally well received by all target groups. Now in the second year of this process, Florida is among those states paving the way for a new era of evaluating criminal justice activities.

The strategy used in Florida to initiate a comprehensive evaluation system employed a three phase effort: 1) system design, 2) pre-implementation activities, and 3) actual implementation.

### III. SYSTEM DESIGN

The need for evaluation, as expressed by the Florida Legislature was rather specific, however, a number of questions arose such as definition of evaluation, the characteristics of a "major program", and the distinctions between "measurable program objectives, performance criteria, and goals" as opposed to performance standards.

As the required evaluations had to be completed within the fiscal year, discussions with departmental managers and administrators were held to determine how internal need coincided with the legislative requirement. Organizational need will vary among criminal justice agencies, however, in Florida's case, the fact that the Department of Offender Rehabilitation was undergoing a major reorganization during the time in which the initial evaluations were taking place required special attention in the evaluation system development. Therefore, it was concluded that the emphasis should be on service delivery. Additionally the process of evaluation needed to be uncomplicated, practical, efficient, manageable, and productive - a rational process anchored firmly in the real world.

#### A. Determination of Evaluation System Parameters

An important factor in examining the requirement to evaluate is to

determine the parameters within which the evaluation system must function. As the guidelines in this area were fairly well defined by law, this initial step posed no serious impediments to designing an evaluation system for Florida. However, the more vague the requirement to evaluate, the more crucial this step becomes and the more specific the agency must be in stating its evaluation parameters.

#### B. Determination of Evaluation System Scope and Objectives

The second step in the initial phase is to identify the desired result; specifically the scope and objectives of the evaluations, the programs to be evaluated, and the level and type of information to provide in the final report. At this point, the "ideal" system, within reason, should be described. Succeeding activities in the design of an evaluation system, described herein, will explain how the "model" system can be modified to suit the situation at hand. It was found in Florida, that describing the ideal system at the outset saves time and effort in the long run and later changes to the correctional system will not necessitate a complete revision of the evaluation system. The goal or ideal system remains as the model to which adjustments are continually made.

Florida's second year evaluations were delayed nearly six months because the initial design of the evaluation system had been based on the current situation. The reports of the first three evaluations were criticized for not being specific enough, thus the first half of this fiscal year was spent redesigning the comprehensive evaluation system to allow for a more sophisticated examination of program operation. Had the Florida system been originally designed to accommodate incremental changes as discussed above, such a lengthy delay might not have been necessary.



As the parameters for the evaluation system are developed based on the requirement to evaluate, the scope, i.e. the level of effort desired, must be determined. Evaluation of a program can range from a broad study of the entire service delivery system, including indirect and direct services, related services and cost, to a narrow assessment of the end product alone. Florida's system takes the middle ground between these two extremes by evaluating not only the end-product but the program facilities, equipment, cost, and direct services which contribute to the end-product. The determination of the scope should be based upon both external requirements and organizational need. Modification of the scope, based on system constraints, is always a possibility and the means to achieve such will be discussed at a later point.

Goals and objectives for the evaluation system are then developed. These statements should reflect both the scope and the system parameters in specific terms that parallel organizational need and external requirements. The overall goal of Florida's Comprehensive Evaluation System was to "fulfill the legislative mandate through an ongoing examination of departmental programs which will generate necessary information for both internal and external use in a valid, scientific manner." Specific objectives established for this system were as follows:

1. Evaluate 20% of the Department's major programs annually.
2. Compile the data in order that the most efficient and effective utilization of limited program resources may be made.
3. Provide information for program modification and development.
4. Provide information for the budget development process.
5. Provide an accounting of Departmental activities for the legislature, the public, and other state and federal agencies.

6. Identify program problem areas and elicit rapid and sensitive responses.
7. Provide standards for equitable service delivery throughout the system.

Thus the specific areas of concentration are identified in the goals and objectives. When coupled with the scope and parameters, a relatively explicit picture of the evaluation system began to emerge.

#### C. Identification of Programs to be Evaluated

The next task was to identify the programs to be evaluated. In Florida, the law specified "20% of all major programs annually". In other agencies, criteria for selection may be based on federally funded projects and other programs requiring evaluation by law; programs which indicate unusual problems, successes, or cost; or programs indicated by the agency administration.

The less broadly defined a program is, the more specific its evaluation will be, given equal personnel, time and fiscal resources. Quite a problem arose in Florida because of the mandate to evaluate 20% of all major programs annually. As the resources to be devoted to evaluation were fixed, a major program had to be defined broadly enough so that 20% of the total would not constitute an unreasonable number of evaluations each year, yet specific enough that the information obtained would not be so nebulous as to be useless. Accordingly, a major program was defined as: one "which delivers direct services to those under departmental supervision and which is a program component, or a budget cost center for which expenditures are reported, or another service component having major fiscal significance." As the law strongly emphasized fiscal information as part of the evaluation, the programs

were defined along these lines. As a result, twenty programs were identified, requiring that four programs be evaluated annually.

D. Identification of Evaluation Target Group (those to whom evaluation is addressed)

The following task was to identify the audience to whom the final evaluation report would be directed. This was crucial in obtaining agency support for the evaluation effort. If the reports are to be utilized primarily by field personnel concerned with the day to day operation of a program, sophisticated statistical analyses of the data would, more than likely, not be understood, and the entire effort would be rejected. If, on the other hand, the target group is a legislative committee who will determine the level of continuation program funding, if any, the report must speak to demonstrable program success as well as the corresponding cost implications. While the audience may never be specified in writing it is important for the evaluators to consider the primary target group when designing the methodology and analyzing the resultant data.

E. Design of Evaluation Methodology

When the preceding tasks were completed, sufficient information regarding the evaluation needs and requirements was available to begin designing the evaluation methodology. While evaluating on an ad hoc basis allows the agency to develop methodologies specifically suited to the needs and requirements of each individual evaluation, the concern in Florida was to the development of an evaluation system; thus the methodology developed had to be flexible enough to embrace a variety of different programs yet static enough to assure continuity over a period of time.

As mentioned previously, most classical evaluation methodologies are not suited to criminal justice programs by virtue of either their complexity or the inappropriateness of the population under examination. Additionally, a number of classical methodologies require that data be collected throughout the program operation. While this may be feasible for certain pilot projects, the majority of criminal justice programs are ongoing, thus no provision for complete data collection can be made.

As a result, the Florida Department of Offender Rehabilitation's Comprehensive Evaluation System is based on a formative evaluation methodology which is particularly suited to the assessment of ongoing programs. Within these general guidelines, it was decided to measure program activity and results in terms of performance standards utilizing a modified systems approach. The result of such evaluation was a measurement of ongoing functions against standards thus pinpointing and describing the deficiencies in both service delivery as well as program end-products.

Performance standards were categorized as measures of inputs, outputs, processes, environmental conditions, and feedback. The standards were then measured individually and the category (input, output, etc.) assessed as a whole. By utilizing such a methodology, recommendations can be specific and implementation priorities assigned at the category as well as the standard level.

The methodology to be utilized by any agency which wants to perform ongoing evaluations must be cognizant of the level of effort desired. Attempting to be too specific for the purpose will only jeopardize the effort in the long run. As each evaluation system will be unique, only general guidelines can be given with respect to developing evaluation

methodologies. The most crucial point is to design a methodology which will result in the type of information required by the target audience. Correspondingly, the methodology must be such that available personnel, fiscal and time resources are sufficient to produce an acceptable result. It is far better to do a good job with a more general methodology than to do a poor job utilizing a complex design.

#### F. Identification of Constraints to Evaluation System

As these efforts should be conducted in pursuit of the ideal the potential constraints to pursuing such an evaluation system must be identified at this point. The major constraint to evaluating criminal justice programs is the limitation on resources, which would be true for any governmental operation. Thus the primary task should be to identify all available resources in terms of time, finances and personnel. Additionally, the evaluation expertise of available personnel must be taken into consideration. An elaborate methodology is not feasible when personnel do not have sufficient skills to execute it properly. With respect to time resources, attention must be paid to developing the final report and the various management review processes required by the agency.

Other major constraints to the evaluation process concern the staff and management who participate in and react to the evaluations. If management does not understand the purpose or uses of evaluation, the results, at best, will be ignored. Line staff most frequently misunderstand evaluation and are thus threatened by it. As these staff are a primary data source, these apprehensions can adversely affect acquisition of valid data.

Philosophical differences among evaluators, another constraint, may

occur depending on the situation. However, if all these constraints can be recognized prior to initiating the evaluation process, then attempts can be made to accommodate these potential stumbling blocks before they cause major problems.

#### IV. PRE-IMPLEMENTATION EFFORTS

The second phase of developing an evaluation system is the pre-implementation activities, specifically: 1) identification of specific resources, 2) action to overcome constraints, 3) revision of evaluation design, and 4) development of the evaluation schedule.

##### A. Identification of Resources

Resource constraints are the most difficult to overcome, particularly time constraints. If the agency is able to identify a full-time evaluation staff, it has a good start, for unless the responsibility for conducting the evaluations is vested in a specific organizational unit, the time factor will become increasingly critical as a result of nebulous accountability. Because the planning process is closely linked to evaluation, the Bureau of Planning, Research and Statistics in the Florida Department of Offender Rehabilitation was vested with the responsibility of designing and conducting agency evaluations. A sub-unit charged with developing performance standards for departmental programs was given lead responsibility in the evaluation efforts. However, resources of the entire bureau were available on an as needed basis, specifically in data collection and analysis efforts. Fortunately, the financial resources to enable this group to make extensive site visits for data collection was available. The major constraint was time. Only through legislative action was the deadline for completion extended three months.

This, however, had the effect of reducing the time available to evaluate during the next fiscal year.

#### B. Overcoming Constraints

Careful planning and efficient utilization of resources is the only means by which these constraints can be accommodated. It is essential that one individual be directly responsible for coordinating evaluation efforts and have access to sufficient personnel resources. The evaluation system utilized in Florida sends the evaluators to the source of the data in order to collect it. While this does require more fiscal, personnel, and time resources than mailing questionnaires, the response rate and accuracy of the data is far superior. Should a mail questionnaire be used, it must be carefully worded to avoid misinterpretation and a strategy developed in order to ensure acceptable response rate

Even such strategies can not completely alleviate the threatening nature of evaluations in the minds of line staff. Thus, the accuracy of mail responses is always subject to question. In Florida it was found that the most effective means of minimizing these fears was to use personal interviews to collect the data. The evaluators were able to assure line personnel that the results would be used positively for program improvement. In addition, the evaluators could judge the personal responses and make accurate assessments of their validity. When a response seemed suspect, rephrasing the question and getting a different (or the same) answer could validate the truth. Anonymity was assured in advance of the interviews so that the respondents could be as candid as possible. Personal data collection methods can be adjusted to suit individual personalities. Additionally, while the questions remained

the same, prefacing remarks were found to aid in the acquisition of the needed data.

Overcoming management (as opposed to staff) misunderstanding of the purpose and use of evaluation requires somewhat different techniques. The most effective means to accomplish this is to involve key administrators in the evaluation design process. Their inclusion from the outset will allow management to understand the "whys and wherefores" of each incremental step of the evaluation process. If administrative concerns are resolved throughout the process, the chances of their rejecting the final product are significantly lower. It is, however, important for the evaluators to remain the "experts" who "advise" management of the proper means to execute their evaluation responsibilities. The administrator who is involved, even when the involvement requires revision after revision, will feel a part of the final product. It is those who have not been consulted who will criticize the results. Thus all efforts to acquire management guidance and involvement must be made.

#### C. Revision of Evaluation System Design

With the constraints resolved to the degree possible, and an explicit identification of all resources made, it is then the job of the evaluators to review their design efforts and make such revisions as are necessary in light of the constraints. For example, in Florida it was originally decided to mail a series of questionnaires to field personnel over an extended period of time. However, upon reviewing the constraints it was determined that the time was not available, nor would the response rate be sufficient to perform an adequate evaluation. Therefore, the scope of the evaluation had to be narrowed.



D. Determination of Evaluation Schedule

Upon revising the evaluation design, specific estimates of the time and staff required were made. A detailed schedule reflecting the individual components and the time necessary to complete each was developed. As each evaluation was conducted, careful attention was paid to the time schedule. When ahead of or behind the original time estimates, the remaining schedule was adjusted to reflect new estimates. In Florida it was found that the original estimates needed adjustment upon conducting the first field visit. However, when the evaluators became familiar with their tasks, the time required was reduced considerably.

V. IMPLEMENTATION OF EVALUATION SYSTEM

Once scheduled, the implementation of the evaluation can begin. This is the third and final phase in the establishment of the system. The initial step in this phase is the training of those who will perform the evaluation. When the comprehensive evaluation system was initiated in Florida, there were no personnel with experience in this particular style of evaluation. Under the circumstances, those primarily responsible for designing the system began the field visits. This strategy proved most practical. Those with whom primary responsibility for the evaluation system was vested, conducted the entire first evaluation. Then, when it was time to conduct a second and third evaluation, these staff had the experience to train others.

A. Data Collection

While it is possible for one individual to perform the data collection, it was found that utilizing at least two data collectors as a team could assimilate considerably more information than one person alone. This,

however, is not a major consideration when personnel resources are severely limited. When utilizing the team approach, capabilities and personalities of individuals should be complimentary and the team should strive to present a professional image. Site visits are the crucial part of the evaluation, and a team that storms into a location, asserting their authority, can only expect a minimum of information. However, the group that emphasizes the importance of the respondents to the effort will acquire that which is needed and more.

#### B. Data Analysis

Upon return from the field visits, the data must be organized and analyzed. "Analysis" for these types of evaluation can range from a general summary of what is happening to sophisticated statistical manipulations. The type of analysis, in any case, is dependent upon the expertise of those handling the data as well as the requirements of management. However complicated the analysis may be, the heart of the evaluation lies in surfacing problems, their apparent causes, and making recommendations to ameliorate the situation. A data analysis which does not produce such results is impractical for any evaluation system.

#### C. Evaluation Report

Once analyzed, the data was presented in a draft report to management and field participants for review and comment. A classical reporting format, including an introduction, background of the evaluation system, description of the methodology utilized, presentation of the analyzed data, and a conclusion, was used in Florida. Some problems surfaced as a result of the length of such a document, however a comprehensive executive summary, including a tabular presentation of the evaluation results have minimized such criticism.

Review of the document by those who are ultimately responsible for its content, i.e. agency administrators, is essential. Experience has shown that this review is helpful to both the evaluators, who may have analyzed the data without the full benefit of the management perspective and to the administrators who may not fully understand the document. If the document is reviewed and explained, the administrator will be considerably more comfortable supporting it both within and outside the agency. It is only with this type of support that the evaluation recommendations will be acted upon.

Additionally, the Florida experience demonstrated, that allowing the field participants to review the draft document, generated support for the next evaluation. These people were assured that they could correct any misrepresentation of the facts which might occur. It was the Florida experience that, rather than criticism of the report, the majority of field comments were in support of the evaluation.

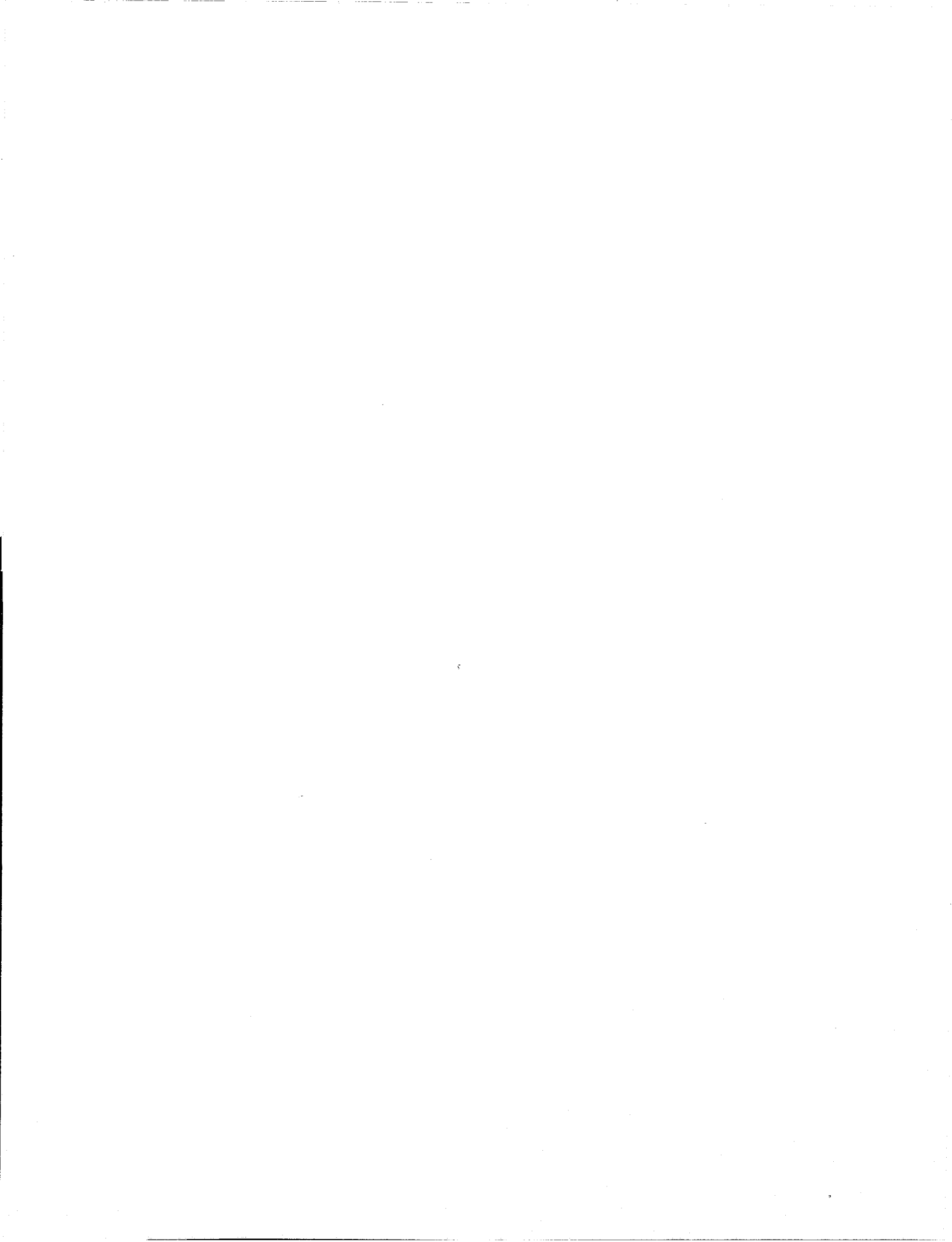
Following the review process, a final report was developed according to the requirements set forth in the evaluation design and distributed to the appropriate personnel. Once published, those responsible for the evaluation must encourage decision makers to act upon the recommendations. Tangible results of the effort reinforces and accumulates support for future undertakings.

## VI. CONCLUSION

It should be obvious that the design and implementation of an evaluation system is no simple undertaking. However, as the pressure for program evaluation gains force, more and more criminal justice agencies will be faced with the need to, or mandate for, evaluation.

Hopefully, the strategies discussed herein will offer some useful guidelines for establishing and initiating an evaluation system. Although these techniques may not be appropriate to each and every situation, it is felt that their applicability to criminal justice agencies in general is such that it can prove useful when faced with a question such as "where do we start?"

It is also obvious that the Florida Department of Offender Rehabilitation is proud of its efforts in this area. No doubt the system we use will be modified as the agency develops. However, the model we used is amenable to such change. This system, and others based on the same principles, can grow with the agency so that evaluation no longer is regarded as a maverick task but an ongoing function of the agency's operation.



**END**