

SAA Strategic Planning: Stakeholder Engagement Strategies

OUTREACH

SAAAs have enhanced their outreach to non-traditional partners: public defense, state health and human service agencies, state and local non-profit service providers, victim service agencies and state departments of education.

BEST PRACTICES

Working with state and local professional associations was considered by SAAs as an engagement best practice and force multiplier.

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

SAAs deployed more than four stakeholder engagement strategies such as interviews, surveys, committees, and focus groups. SAAs indicated that these strategies provided a more nuanced understanding of state, local and geographic needs, trends, and challenges.

Assessment Scope

Since 2009, the National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA), with support from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), has provided training and technical assistance (TTA) in strategic planning to State Criminal Justice Administering Agencies (SAAs) in 20 states, 2 territories, and the District of Columbia. TTA services have been tailored to the needs, planning scopes, and timelines established by SAAs.

Planning efforts by SAAs have varied greatly in size, planning period, and system inclusivity. Many of these variations have to do with planning scope, SAA statutory authority, and planning capacity. The scope of planning varied from grant-specific or agency-wide to broader efforts designed to coordinate the directions of multiple state-level criminal justice agencies. These variations were mainly due to the SAA's statutorily defined role, responsibility, and mission within state government. Despite these variations, SAAs used many common planning tools, engagement strategies and consensus

building approaches. This document, the first in a series of assessments, describes how SAAs engage in strategic planning, examines stakeholder identification, outreach, and the most commonly used engagement strategies. In addition, this report provides information on data integration and strategic planning consensus building strategies.

Executive Summary

Based on this assessment of strategic planning by State Criminal Justice Administering Agencies, NCJA identified the following implications for policy and practice:

- SAAs have enhanced their outreach to non-traditional partners: public defense, state health and human service agencies, state and local non-profit service providers, victim service agencies and state departments of education.
- SAAs consider working with state and local professional associations as an engagement best practice and force multiplier.



NCJA Training and Technical Assistance

Most Commonly Requesting Training and Technical Assistance

SAA Strategic Planning & EBP Consultation	100%
Document Review	94%
Stakeholder Presentation on Strategic Planning	94%
Stakeholder Presentation on EBP	71%
Speaker & Subject Matter Expert Identification & Support	65%
Moderation and Meeting Facilitation	59%
Document Drafting	47%
SAA Staff Trainings	41%

- SAAs deployed more than four stakeholder engagement strategies such as interviews, surveys, committees, and focus groups. SAAs indicated that these strategies provided a more nuanced understanding of state, local, and geographic needs, trends, and challenges.

Methodology

To learn more about how strategic planning works in the field and to help SAAs learn from each other, NCJA conducted an assessment of strategic planning efforts by ten SAAs. All SAAs in this assessment received training or technical assistance from NCJA. Information for this assessment came from a combination of key stakeholder interviews, a short survey, and planning document reviews. A list of the ten SAAs included in this assessment and a description of the training and technical assistance each SAA received is included at the end of this document.

Links to some of the planning documents and tools used by SAAs in their strategic planning efforts are provided throughout this assessment. To view these documents and a selection of strategic plans created by the SAAs, [click here](#).

agement functions. In this role, SAAs distribute federal and state funds across all levels of state and local criminal justice systems. This unique position means that SAA stakeholders come from all levels of government and from diverse areas within the criminal justice system.

Stakeholder Outreach

As SAAs begin their strategic planning initiatives they identify, engage, and educate stakeholders about the planning process and how it will impact the office's grant making and management functions. SAAs reported that they most commonly inform stakeholders about their planning initiatives through direct outreach, relying heavily on email listservs and working with statewide and local professional associations. Many SAAs reported that outreach to professional associations was particularly helpful when it came time to solicit input on the state's most salient criminal justice issues.

Strategic Planning Stakeholder Outreach	
Type of Outreach	Percent of SAAs
Direct Outreach	100%
Email Listservs	90%
Professional Associations	80%
Organizational Website	60%
Direct Mailings	50%
Presentations	40%
Social Media	10%

Strategic Planning: Stakeholders

Although SAAs have multiple functions within state government including system planning and policy development, they are often most widely known for their grant making and man-

Stakeholder Engagement

As SAAs worked on strategic planning they often started by engaging their own standing governing councils or advisory boards. These

boards or councils are often statutorily defined and include a cross section of state and local criminal justice administrators. Of the ten SAAs interviewed for this assessment, six had standing councils and two established high level working groups to engage in and oversee planning initiatives. Although many governing boards include representatives from law enforcement, the courts, and prosecution, most SAAs have worked to broaden representation to include representatives from “non-traditional” partners, including indigent defense, victim services, health and human services, and education. Eighty percent of the SAAs surveyed reported that they had engaged with public defense agencies at either the state or local level. SAAs in Nevada and Nebraska reported that this was the first time that their agencies had engaged state or local level public defenders in either grant or office planning efforts. In addition four SAAs in this assessment engaged partners within academia to assist with planning efforts.

SAA efforts to engage stakeholders throughout the criminal justice system is apparent when examining the various types of state level organizations that helped with trend identification, data integration, or issue area prioritization. Every SAA in the assessment described the active role that representatives from state courts, corrections, and community corrections played in helping SAAs assess the state of their justice systems.

In addition to many of the traditional state level criminal justice partners, SAAs worked to include both state representatives from health and human services and victim services in the planning process. This type of outreach can also be seen in SAA’s efforts to engage with non-profit service providers, many of which work directly with the same populations.

Engaged Organizations	
State Level	Percent of SAAs
Department Of Corrections	100%
Court System	100%
Probation/Parole Agency	90%
Department of Public Safety	90%
Victims Office	80%
Attorney Generals Office	70%
Governors Office	70%
Health/Human Service Agency	70%
Juvenile Justice Agency	70%
State Police and Highway Patrol	70%
State Public Defenders Office	60%
Highway Safety Office	40%



Many SAAs also made a special point to engage with state level professional and organizational associations. State and organizational associations represented multiple elements of the justice system most commonly: law enforcement, corrections, community corrections, prosecution, and courts.

SAAs reported that working with state professional associations allowed them access to leaders at the local level and also allowed the SAAs to take advantage of professional networks to increase outreach to criminal justice practitioners. The use of established and active networks was particularly helpful for SAAs when trying to identify trends, needs, and emerging issues within sectors of the criminal justice system. States such as Oklahoma, Illinois, and Mississippi worked closely with professional associations to not only distribute information about strategic planning efforts, but also to solicit input and participation in statewide conferences, focus groups, and surveys.

Engaged Organizations	
Non-Profits	Percent of SAAs
Service Providers	90%
Associations	70%
Advocacy Organizations	40%

In states with more limited planning scopes and smaller staffs, state criminal justice associations were key partners and were looked upon to represent local practitioner communities. In Utah, Nebraska and Nevada, which have shorter planning processes and smaller planning scopes, criminal justice associations either held positions on established planning committees or were members of ad-hoc planning teams. Overall many SAAs reported association engagement to be one of their planning best practices.

SAAs also worked closely with local law enforcement. In fact 80 percent of SAAs had at least one high-level city or county law enforcement official on their governing boards and planning committees. In addition, 70 percent of SAAs engaged local criminal justice coordinating bodies. These local planning bodies are a great resource for SAAs working

Engaged Organizations	
Localities	Percent of SAAs
Police and Sheriffs	90%
Prosecutors	70%
Criminal Justice Coordinating Councils	70%
Corrections	50%
Parole & Probation	50%
Public Safety Agency	40%
Public Defense	40%
Courts	40%

Soliciting Stakeholder Input	
Strategies	Percent of SAAs
Key Informant Interviews	100%
Presentations	90%
Councils, Committees, and Working Group Meetings	80%
Surveys	80%
Focus Groups	60%
Conferences	40%
Public Comment/Website	10%

on identifying local and regional issues, trends, needs, and change strategies within the criminal justice arena.

Overall, SAAs sought to involve stakeholders throughout the criminal justice system. In this assessment, the average SAA consulted with more than 16 components of state and local justice systems. At the local level, SAAs engaged with an average of five elements of city and county justice systems. Although the average of five elements may seem small, it represents many more local city and county agencies throughout the state. As states in this assessment work to expand the variety of programs they fund, they have also expanded the number of stakeholders involved in the planning process.

Soliciting Input from the Field

Key Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews with key stakeholders, the most commonly used method to solicit input from the field, were frequently used by SAAs as a starting point for identifying state and local issues and trends. The majority of those interviewed were high ranking agency heads, many of whom were engaged as members of SAA governing boards or planning committees. In addition to working with established partners, SAAs also used stakeholder interviews as a way to engage non-traditional stakeholders including health and human service agency officials and key leaders in the non-profit sector.

Interview formats varied greatly, ranging from simple, open-ended conversations with agency heads to formalized interviews with question guides and aggregated assessments. In [Ohio](#) and Illinois, the SAA used structured interviews to engage with state and local criminal justice stakeholders. In Ohio, the SAA used 24 formal interviews to initiate their planning process. Interviewees provided input on trends, needs, and issues from their respective fields; this information was used as a starting point for system-wide issue identification and prioritization. To validate priorities identified through the interview process, states used secondary mechanisms such as surveys and focus groups to reinforce or add local texture to issue areas.

Surveys

Used for expanding local practitioner input and refining the prioritization process, surveys were seen as an efficient and cost effective way of building a consensus. Although the use of surveys was very common in this assessment, the way the tool was used varied greatly. For example, Oklahoma used two different surveys, the [first](#) on law enforcement equipment needs, and a [second](#) aimed at identifying needs throughout the criminal justice system.

In [Utah](#), [Nevada](#), and [Mississippi](#), surveys were used as way of unanimously prioritizing needs. Administered to members of governing boards and planning groups, these surveys used ranking questions across purpose areas to refine priority investment categories. Nebraska used a similar type of survey to help their planning and advisory bodies establish needs which were later used for a second survey aimed at ranking priorities.

Surveys were typically between 8–12 questions, the majority of which were close ended.

At least three SAAs indicated they used online tools to create, distribute, and analyze survey results. Online surveys also allowed states to minimize staff time dedicated to processing and analyzing respondent input.

Another survey variation seen in Utah and Oklahoma employed early qualifying questions related to the population density of the respondent's service area; this allowed the SAA to compare identified needs and issues based on a rural, suburban, and urban classification system. This strategy helped provide greater texture related to state and local priorities. In addition, Oklahoma also asked other qualifying questions related to the part of the justice system the respondent represented, which allowed the SAA to identify sector-specific needs and control for the possibility of over representation of particular parts of the field. Whether used to define needs or refine priorities, SAAs indicated that surveys were a cost-effective method for gathering input from many more practitioners than would have been possible through interviews or focus groups.

Focus Groups

Although more complex to set up than surveys and harder to moderate than interviews, focus groups can be an important tool for both gathering and disseminating information. West Virginia, Georgia, Ohio, and Tennessee all used this technique (in combination with others) to solicit input from key practitioners. In [West Virginia](#), for example, more than 50 practitioners and administrators from across the justice system took part in large professionally moderated focus groups. In Tennessee and [Ohio](#), the SAAs used regional focus groups, which were held at statewide evidence-based policy and practice and best practice conferences. [Georgia](#) took the regional model a step further, setting

Strategic Planning Data Integration	
Criminal Justice Sector	Percent of SAAs
Law Enforcement	100%
Probation/Parole	100%
Corrections	89%
Substance Abuse & Mental Health	89%
Courts	78%
Juvenile Justice	78%
Prosecution	67%
Victims and Witness	67%
Public Defense	33%

up focus groups in local communities. Although logistically more complicated, this strategy allowed for increased representation from local practitioners. Tennessee used web conference technology for smaller focus group sessions, which offered an opportunity to reach a greater number of local practitioners without the cost of travel.

The SAAs indicated that the focus group model helped achieve both a level of granularity and a cross-system perspective that was valuable for planning purposes. In addition, multiple SAAs noted that the focus group format allowed for a greater interaction that went beyond needs identification and toward strategy development. As a secondary benefit, the SAAs could engage with non-traditional partners at the local level. Although many local level stakeholders knew of the SAA or were familiar with the work they did, for some the focus group was their first interaction with the agency. Local non-profit service providers in particular had not traditionally been engaged in previous grant making or strategic planning processes.

Logistically, SAAs used three models for focus groups:

1. open meetings in local communities,
2. invitation-only statewide focus groups, and
3. regionalized open-invitation focus groups.

Focus group size varied and was often dictated by interest. SAAs used experienced moderators to guide groups through both issue identification and strategy or priority development. In multiple cases, the SAAs used outside moderators or received training to enhance staff capacity for facilitating group discussions. In addition, SAAs used focus group guides to create consensus building, maintain focus, and ensure that all identified topics were covered. Generally, the focus groups lasted between 1–2 hours, including time for introductory comments and questions about the SAAs strategic planning process.

Committees, Counsels, and Working Groups

Eight of the ten SAAs included in this assessment either had established governing boards already in place or created high-level planning groups that guided the strategic planning initiative. In Utah, Nebraska, and Nevada, strategic planning initiatives were mostly internal, with group members identifying needs and creating priorities. In Nebraska and Nevada these groups were created with representation from across the justice system. These groups not only engaged with traditional partners, but also included public defense and members of academia.

Responsibilities of working groups and governing boards consisted mainly of overseeing engagement initiatives, assisting with the identification of issues and needs, and helping to finalize the prioritization of needs within the state. Although some governing boards were involved in high-level discussions about specific modalities or funding strategies, many left that work to the SAA staff. SAAs reported that planning groups and governing boards met at least quarterly, with many subgroups meeting more frequently. When working on prioritization, many SAAs used all-day or multi-day planning meetings that brought together the multiple engagement strategies used to solicit input, integrate data, and refine priorities.

As SAAs engaged in strategic planning, they looked to multiple models for soliciting input on state and local needs and priorities. The average SAA employed more than four different engagement strategies in an effort to collate information from multiple sectors of the criminal justice system. Each SAA created a strategic planning strategy that worked for the needs and capacities of their particular office.

Although there was some overlap in how states used information to build consensus, this process was often scaled to the planning timelines, period, and scope. Shorter strategic planning timelines were often applied to grant specific plans, while longer timelines were most often applied to office-wide or system-wide planning efforts. In addition, states that engaged in longer strategic planning cycles tended to use more engagement strategies

Data Integration

The integration of data into strategic planning efforts is not only important for identifying the most salient criminal justice needs, but also for advancing data-driven decision making. SAAs most often looked to their state's Statistical Analysis Center (SAC) to provide this data. SACs in Illinois, Ohio, and West Virginia were also called upon to manage large parts of the strategic planning process, including creating, managing, and reporting on surveys and focus groups. The average SAA in this assessment used data from at least six of the nine criminal justice sectors listed in the table on page 7. SAAs indicated that they most often used publicly available data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Report (UCR) data, state corrections data, and information from the courts. In addition to publicly available data sources, multiple SAAs relied on information from sub grantees and performance measures for currently funded projects to help inform decision making. SAAs indicated they found it helpful to look at data both regionally, as well as by county. This was especially true for states like Tennessee, which targets grant funds toward communities with the highest crime rates and greatest needs. [Ohio](#) and [Illinois](#) used their strategic planning efforts as a catalyst for advancing the amount of data available to planning group members

and the general public. In both states, the SAA created interactive data tools, which are available online for other agencies and further grantees to use. Overall, SAAs used data on state and local criminal justice systems to help outline and define the issues identified through interviews, meetings, surveys, and focus groups.

Disclaimer This document was created with the support of Grant No. 2010-DB-BX-K086 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the SMART Office, and the Office for Victims of Crime. Points of view or opinions are those of the authors.

Summary of Training and Technical Assistance Provided by the National Criminal Justice Association

Below are descriptions of the training and technical assistance (TTA) NCJA provided to the ten State Administering Agencies (SAAs) included in the assessment of stakeholder identification, outreach, and the most commonly used engagement strategies:

Georgia

In Georgia, NCJA conducted trainings for the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council as well as several regional trainings across the state to inform the stakeholder communities and the SAA's sub-grantees on strategic planning and evidence-based practices. This community engagement model is providing the SAA with input for a statewide strategic plan that incorporates evidence-based strategies to address the priorities identified by their stakeholders. NCJA moderated focus groups and conducted group and individual trainings with SAA staff to enhance their group facilitation skills. The SAA is in the process of planning additional regional meetings to solicit input for review and prioritization by the Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council.

Illinois

In Illinois, NCJA assisted the Criminal Justice Information Authority in conducting a statewide conference on evidence-based programs in criminal justice and in developing a statewide strategic plan backed by data and measurement. The state Statistical Analysis Center (SAC), which is located within the SAA, pro-

vided substantive information for participants on evaluated evidence-based programs in Illinois as well as nationally available programs. A number of working groups were created to engage in detailed exploration and analysis of the priority issues identified at the conference. From this effort, Illinois is developing a comprehensive strategic plan.

Mississippi

In Mississippi, NCJA helped to plan and conduct a one-day strategic planning session with the Department of Public Safety, Division of Public Safety Planning, Office of Justice Programs staff, and key stakeholders. The results from this session were used to develop a strategy for the office's strategic planning efforts. With limited staff time, the SAA worked with a local partner to develop and execute surveys of key stakeholders, as well as focus groups composed of state and local practitioners. Their plan has been submitted to DOJ and can be found here.

Nebraska

In Nebraska, training was provided to a group of stakeholders that included representatives from all parts of the criminal justice system and members of the Nebraska Commission on Crime and Law Enforcement. Training focused on evidence-based programs and strategic planning methodologies and outcomes. A training conference for teams from multi-jurisdictional taskforces in the state was also held to discuss evidence-based programs in policing.



With the knowledge gained from NCJA training, the SAA worked with a university partner to take on the day-to-day work of the office's strategic planning. The SAA is currently in the process of finalizing their strategic plan.

Nevada

In Nevada, NCJA worked with the Nevada Department of Public Safety's Office of Criminal Justice Assistance on creating a statewide strategic plan that includes voices from across the criminal justice system. As a result, the SAA now includes the SAC in their work and involves the public defender community in their regular stakeholder meetings. The SAA has also used their strategic planning to create a multi-year plan that moves the state's multi-jurisdictional taskforces towards state and local funding. They have also funded a statewide information sharing initiative and have focused on building local capacity through Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne JAG) funds designated for a new localized practitioner training strategy.

Ohio

In Ohio, the Office of Criminal Justice Services conducted surveys and focus groups among their key stakeholders to encourage statewide involvement in setting priorities and identifying needs in the Ohio criminal justice system. The Ohio SAA also conducted a statewide conference on evidence-based programs, bringing together key stakeholders to discuss priorities and contribute to the statewide strategic planning process. NCJA assisted in the planning process and also conducted a 3-hour interactive workshop on strategic planning with their key stakeholders in conjunction with this statewide conference.

Oklahoma

In Oklahoma, NCJA worked with the District Attorneys Council to expand their traditional strategic planning efforts from a single day open meeting to a more data driven stakeholder-informed planning process. NCJA worked with the SAA to gather relevant state data and develop two surveys to help build consensus around the state's greatest criminal justice needs and priorities. After analyzing these results the SAA developed a statewide strategic plan which is now available on the [SAA's website](#). The SAA also had planned for a multi-day strategic planning session to be moderated by an outside professional. Unfortunately, due to new DOJ rules on conference approval and expenses the SAA was unable to obtain approval for the meeting.

Tennessee

In Tennessee, the state legislature passed a bill requiring that juvenile justice funds be used for evidence-based programs. The Tennessee Office of Criminal Justice Programs (OCJP) conducted a statewide conference, with assistance from NCJA, to educate their stakeholder communities and sub-grantees on evidence-based programs and their implementation at the local level. In addition, this meeting was used to help integrate the work of the office's Targeted Community Crime Reduction Project into their larger planning strategy. In preparation for the conference, the SAA held regional focus groups for local practitioners. Information from these focus groups will be used for the office's next yearly strategic planning effort. With planning grants, the SAA is also funding several pilot projects in which sub-grantees

are required to collect and use data to inform their strategic planning. Also, the sub-grantees must use only evidence-based programs and practices to address the data-identified justice issues.

NCJA also worked with the Tennessee SAA to collect data at the state and national level and convene a group of drug court professionals to share effective and innovative policies and practices. NCJA facilitated a moderated strategic planning session, with judges, advisory board members, prosecutors, defenders, and members of the Tennessee Association of Drug Court Professionals, to help establish priorities for the state's dedicated drug court funding. The resulting report is published on the [OCJP website](#) for use by the drug court stakeholder community in Tennessee.

Utah

In Utah, NCJA provided the Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice with training on both strategic planning and the use and development of evidence-based and evidence-generating programs. This training set in motion a significant effort by both the SAA and its governing board to improve their process for making funding decisions and for investing in developing evidence to support homegrown initiatives. This effort led to the creation of an entirely new funding process to address the priorities generated from their annual strategic planning process. It resulted in a decision to invest in evidence-based and evidence-generating programs. Today, the SAA has also shifted its funding strategies and enhanced its focus on funding evaluations for its larger Byrne JAG-funded community corrections initiatives.

West Virginia

In West Virginia, NCJA provided TA regarding evidence-based programs to conduct a strategic planning session, problem identification, and prioritization. The Division of Justice and Community Services has since developed strategies to address the priority areas and measures for evaluating progress which has informed the SAA strategic plan. NCJA training and SAA efforts resulted in increased involvement by the SAC in the SAA's grant making and management functions. The SAC is now involved in helping to create performance measures for sub-grantees and working to help make sure the data collection elements are in place to support effective performance measurement.

Summary

As a result of this training and technical assistance, SAAs are spending a greater portion of their Byrne JAG funds on data collection and analysis. SAAs across the country are devoting significant staff resources to reaching out more broadly than ever before to their stakeholder community for input and development of a statewide strategic plan. The strategic plans are becoming more sophisticated in their use of data to inform what works to prevent and reduce crime. Also, to an increasing degree, SAAs are requiring their sub-grantees to gather and conduct more analysis on their priority crime initiatives. In addition, an emphasis is placed on the submission of applications for funding for projects that are proven to work, are seeking to replicate evidence-based practices from other jurisdictions, or that will include the analysis of data to measure outcomes.