



Frequently Asked Questions: Evidence-Based Practices in Criminal Justice Settings

What is Evidence-Based Practice?

Evidence-Based Practices (EBP) are approaches which have been empirically researched and proven to have measureable positive outcomes.

What is Evidence?

Evidence helps people to form conclusions or judgments. It is an outward sign rather than something felt intuitively. The most reliable form of evidence is empirical evidence, based on well-designed studies. Anecdotal evidence is the least reliable form of evidence.



What are the Challenges of Implementing Evidence-Based Practices?

- Requires a dedicated commitment to change at all levels of an organization
- Often requires increased emphasis on accountability, both individually and collectively
- Requires reconsideration of current practices and letting go of the “that’s always how we’ve done it” philosophy
- May result in resistance as some people are forced out of their comfort zone

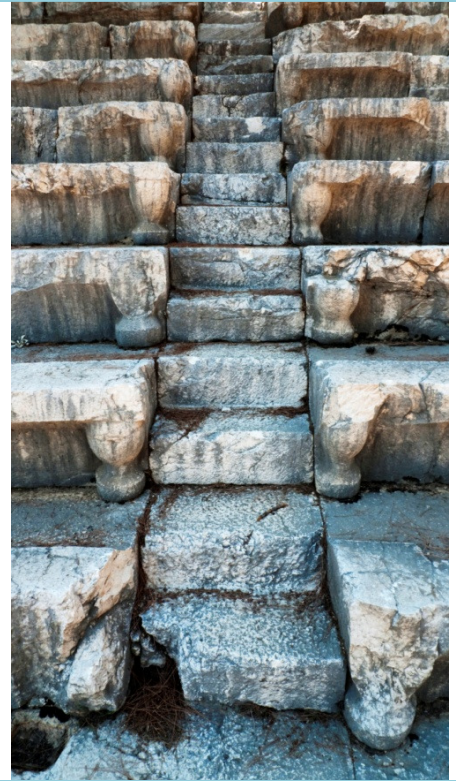


What is the Difference Between Evidence-Based Practices and Best Practices?

Evidence-Based Practices	Best Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emphasis on empirical research ▪ Control of confounding variables through random assignment ▪ Consistency of findings ▪ Cross-site replication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conventional wisdom ▪ Repeatable procedures that have proven themselves over time ▪ Not necessarily proven through rigorous research

Key Steps to Implementing Evidence-Based Practices

1. Identify the problem and desired outcomes
2. Locate the research that addresses the problem
3. Critically evaluate the evidence identified in the research
4. Assess the extent to which current practices are consistent with the identified evidence-based practices
5. Develop an implementation strategy and implement the program
6. Evaluate the impact of new practices on desired outcomes



Why use Evidence-Based Practices in Criminal Justice Settings?

Because they:

- ✓ Put an end to risky “trial and error” approaches with offenders
- ✓ Build on the lessons learned from our predecessors
- ✓ Promote consistency and responsible practices
- ✓ Allow us to invest resources wisely and to achieve desired outcomes.
- ✓ Ensure internal and external stakeholders understand our practices and decisions
- ✓ Increase accountability and improve our chances of reducing crime
- ✓ Maximize the likelihood of offender success

Eight Evidence-Based Principles for Effective Intervention in Community Corrections

1. Assess Actuarial Risk/Needs
2. Enhance Intrinsic Motivation
3. Target Interventions
4. Skill Train with Directed Practice (Use Cognitive Behavioral Treatment Methods)
5. Increase Positive Reinforcement
6. Engage Ongoing Support in Natural Communities
7. Measure Relevant Processes/Practices
8. Provide Measurement Feedback

From: *Implementing Evidence-Based Policy and Practice in Community Corrections*, 2nd ed. (October 2009). U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections.

<http://nicic.gov/Downloads/PDF/Library/024107.pdf>

Case Study: Travis County Adult Probation

Probation departments in Texas and across the country are being challenged by increasing demands for services and expectations that probation should more effectively reduce recidivism. In response, departments have been moving towards a model of “evidence-based practices” that orients supervision to recidivism reduction. This entails changing operations, from paper-work management to casework. The change requires the implementation of more effective assessments based on scientific tools, use of supervision strategies that fit the needs and risk of the population, and programs that can produce results.

Beginning in 2005, Travis County Adult Probation has been engaged in a “top to bottom” realignment of organizational practices to support a more effective operational model called Travis Community Impact Supervision or TCIS. TCIS involved reengineering the department to support strategies that research show to be effective in managing the risk of the probation population. TCIS includes two critical elements of a strong probation system: 1) enforcement of the conditions of probation, and 2) providing offenders with the resources and motivation to effect change by addressing their criminogenic traits. The key is to use methods that have been proven to work – thus, the term “Evidence-Based.”

Improving assessment practices is critical in reforming probation. Diagnosis of offenders along risk and criminogenic factors using evidence-based assessment tools is critical to: (a) distinguish offenders along characteristics that identify their supervision needs; (b) guide judges in setting appropriate conditions of supervision; (c) guide probation administrators in designing differentiated supervision strategies; (d) provide probation officers with reliable information to formulate and implement effective supervision plans; and, (e) devise clear outcome expectations for the different populations. Therefore, the first major task for the project was to reform the assessment practices in the department. These processes were radically altered by creating a new Diagnostic Report and a Central Diagnostic Unit. Both were approved by the Travis judiciary and implemented in April 2007.

The result was the reduction in new arrests and felony probation revocations pre -and post-implementation of TCIS. Travis County Adult Probation compared 1,287 felons placed on probation pre-TCIS (Jan-June 2006) to 614 post-TCIS probationers (July-Oct 2007). Both groups were tracked for 1 year after probation placements for new arrests using the TX DPS database. The percent re-arrested in 1 year after placement on probation declined from 29% in the pre-TCIS group to 24% in the post-TCIS group. This represents a 17% decline in the re-arrest rate. Revocation trends show a sustained decline in the number of felony revocations in Travis County after implementation of TCIS.

How Can Evidence-Based Practices Produce Results in the Real World?

- Travis County Adult Probation has accomplished a transformation that changed and strengthened the internal processes and culture of the organization to promote evidence-based practices.
- Adult Probation staff has a clear and realistic vision of the future direction. They have been trained by national experts in evidence-based practices and have participated in intensive planning and implementation processes.
- Assessment and sanctioning strategies have been enhanced, and officers have been trained to provide more intensive supervision for higher risk offenders.
- Adult Probation has strengthened its quality control measures through research, evaluation, and measurement of outcomes (re-arrest) important to the Travis County Community.
- Initial results show reductions in new arrests, probation revocations, and costs to both the State and Travis County.
- A May 2009 report by the Council of State Governments Justice Center (CSG) estimates that over **\$4.8 million in state incarceration costs were avoided due to reduced revocations.**



Where can you go for resources and research?

Criminal Justice

National Institute of Corrections

<http://nicic.gov/EBPBoxSet>

Crime and Justice Institute

<http://cjinstitute.org/projects/webinars/series1>

National Criminal Justice Reference Service

<http://www.ncjrs.gov/App/AbstractDB/AbstractDBSearch.aspx>

Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

<http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/>

Evidence-Based Behavioral Practice

www.ebbp.org

National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors Research Institute

www.nri-inc.org/data_topics/

Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute at the University of Washington

<http://lib.adai.washington.edu/instruments/>

National Institute of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov

Social Programs

The Campbell Collaboration

www.campbellcollaboration.org

Evidence-Based Practices for the Helping Professions

www.evidence.brookscoll.com/database.html

Social Programs that Work

<http://evidencebasedprograms.org>

The Community Guide

www.thecommunityguide.org

Evidence-Based Practice Committee
Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable

www.atc-reentryroundtable.org

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