

The PROSECUTOR

Bureau of Justice Assistance's Smart Prosecution Initiative Solicits Grant Applications

BY KIM BALL

PROSECUTORS ARE KEY DECISION-MAKERS and policy-makers in the criminal justice system. They represent the community, strive to control crime, and ensure that justice prevails. The local prosecutor ensures that justice is done in a fair, effective and efficient manner, and is focused on three goals: to promote the fair, impartial, and expeditious pursuit of justice, ensure safer communities, and promote integrity in the prosecution profession and effective coordination in the criminal justice system.¹

As prosecutors begin to use innovative, best practice or evidenced-based approaches to address the goals listed above, there is a need to research and evaluate those efforts. Recognizing this need, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) established the Smart Prosecution initiative in 2014. This initiative provides grants to encourage exploration of new solutions to public safety concerns, while employing a research partner at the problem definition stage through assessment of strategies and solutions.

Creative solutions developed by prosecutors around the country range from minor changes in how their organizations prioritize cases, like using zone/geographic prosecution, to more complex approaches, including:

- gun reduction programs
- nuisance abatement
- crime prevention through environmental design
- drug-free and prostitute-free zones
- restorative justice
- community courts
- truancy abatement
- diversion programs
- graffiti cleanup to improve neighborhood safety

Prosecutors build partnerships by bringing together the police, the community, and other criminal justice and local agencies to find ways they can work together to solve problems in their jurisdictions.

BJA's Smart Prosecution initiative will develop a body of knowledge about data-driven strategies as they are implemented by prosecutors. The Smart Prosecution model builds off of the lessons learned from BJA's "Smart Suite" of crime-fighting programs. The Smart Prosecution initiative is one component of BJA's Smart Suite that includes Smart Pretrial, Smart Policing and Smart Supervision. The Smart Prosecution grants will pair an operational, results-focused researcher with a prosecutor's office to develop data-driven solutions that will ultimately improve public safety. It will provide other valuable resources to equip a prosecutor's office to access data across various criminal justice and non-criminal justice information systems to improve results for communities. The lessons learned from the Smart Prosecution initiative will develop a rich body of evidence for use by prosecutors nationally as they seek to work with communities to solve chronic problems and fight violent crime.

In September 2014 at the 9th National Prosecution Summit in Dallas, Texas, BJA announced the recipients of its inaugural class of Smart Prosecution grants. Four agencies from across the United States will test data-driven approaches that address one or more of the goals listed above.



¹ *Prosecution in the 21st Century: Goals, Objectives and Performance Measures*, National District Attorneys Association; American Prosecutors Research Institute; February 2004.

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This year's recipients are:

Cook County IL State's Attorney Office. The Cook County State's Attorney Office is expanding and evaluating its Misdemeanor Deferred Prosecution Enhancement Program. This program seeks to reduce subsequent criminal behavior, reduce costs to the system, minimize the collateral consequences resulting from low-level nonviolent convictions, and share findings with the larger community.

Harris County, TX. The Harris County District Attorney's Office in partnership with the County Court of Law is establishing a Misdemeanor Prostitution Court that identifies and treats the needs of prostituted young adults, ages 17-25, who are at an increased risk of further sexual exploitation.

Office of the Los Angeles City Attorney. The Los Angeles City Attorney is implementing a program called Introducing New Tools based on Evidence and Risk Assessments to Confirm Eligibility for Prosecution Treatment (INTERCEPT). This new program utilizes evidence-based risk assessments to evaluate prosecutorial diversion options for misdemeanor offenders and implements restorative justice strategies in the form of community justice panels.

San Francisco District Attorney's Office. The San Francisco District Attorney's Office is establishing a Crime Strategies and Intelligence Unit. This new unit will gather appropriate and valid data, using statistical tools to identify chronic locations and chronic offenders in San Francisco. In addition, the unit will work closely with neighborhood prosecution teams to identify offenders and cases for the Neighborhood Courts.

To assist the awardees' plans and implement their Smart Prosecution initiative, BJA selected the Association of Prosecuting Attorneys to serve as the national training and technical assistance provider.

In February, the BJA released the FY2015 Smart Prosecution Solicitation, which will fund up to an additional four sites around the country. Areas of focus for this year's solicitation include, but are not limited to, applying best or evidence-based practices to contemporary crime problems and criminogenic circumstances; developing innovative data-driven and crime analysis approaches to reduce crime; improving internal office procedures that ensure public trust and confidence in the justice system; and inculcating innovative, best or evidence-based approaches in local offices. Applications are due by March 26, 2015, <https://www.bja.gov/Funding/15SmartProsSol.pdf>.

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