

# Keeping Your Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee Going Strong

by Michael R. Jones, Senior Project Associate, Pretrial Justice Institute, Washington, D.C.

An increasing number of local jurisdictions are creating criminal justice coordinating committees (CJCCs) to make the justice system more effective and to manage limited resources. Because CJCCs have so much potential, it is important that local stakeholders keep their committees functioning well. This article provides some tips for keeping your local CJCC vibrant and effective.

## What Is a CJCC?

In a nutshell, a CJCC is the forum through which elected and appointed executive-level policymakers in local jurisdictions—and sometimes states—convene to collaboratively address issues facing the justice system and its constituent agencies. These committees (sometimes called “councils” or “boards”) typically have staff support from one or more criminal justice planners. They often use a data-guided and structured planning process to identify, analyze, and solve or manage justice system issues, such as jail crowding, resource reductions, case processing inefficiencies, sub-par outcomes, and client populations that pose a particular challenge (e.g., persons with mental illness or a history of substance abuse).

CJCCs differ from other criminal justice committees in that they are designed to be permanent, ongoing, advisory boards that not only solve some specific problems as they arise, but, more importantly, monitor the system’s functioning and manage its collective workload. These committees can work on adult criminal justice or juvenile justice issues or both.

The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) has published an easy-to-read but highly informative guidebook for setting up or improving an existing CJCC. The link to download a free copy of *Guidelines for Developing a Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee* is provided at the end of this article.

“The Strategic Planning Committee is the most important committee I serve on.”

—Brooke Jackson, Chief Judge and CJCC Chairperson, Jefferson County, Colorado

## What Can a CJCC Do?

Of the 3,000-plus counties in the United States, there are probably fewer than 100 with CJCCs whose scope of work goes beyond simple grant administration. Nonetheless, this number was much lower just

10 years ago, as more and more jurisdictions have recently created a CJCC or transformed an existing committee into a CJCC because of the great benefits that these committees can bring.

These benefits can come in many forms. CJCCs have helped law enforcement, the courts, and correctional facilities and programs in a number of ways.

- CJCCs have mapped for multiple local police departments locations where offenders are reentering into the community and how that has changed over time, so that law enforcement can strategically allocate its resources.
- For the courts, CJCCs have identified case processing inefficiencies that, once remedied, have led to reduced backlog in the courts.
- For corrections agencies, CJCCs have helped probation departments develop intermediate sanctions for dealing with probation violators, which in turn reduced the demand on jail beds.

These are just a few examples. Because of the decision-level policymakers who serve on a CJCC, the CJCC's mission, and the data-guided process it uses to work on issues, a CJCC is uniquely positioned to effectively and efficiently address any issue that confronts the local justice system.

### **What Are Some Examples of High-Functioning CJCCs?**

Beginning in early 2011, the Federal Bureau of Justice Assistance awarded the Justice Management Institute (JMI) a grant to convene representatives from the nation's highest functioning CJCCs into a network.

This new network:

- Provides an outlet for CJCC leaders and senior staff to discuss common issues and opportunities;
- Facilitates a learning exchange among CJCCs on promising innovations and evidence-based policy and practice;
- Creates a network of CJCC leaders and staff for ongoing peer-to-peer technical assistance; and
- Develops materials that will aid CJCCs in their policy-making and will assist other jurisdictions in developing effective CJCCs of their own.

Experts from the National Association of Counties (NACo) and the Pretrial Justice Institute (PJI) also provide staff support to what has been named the "Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Network."

The CJCC Network currently has 12 inaugural members that have shared information and ideas to not only improve their own committees, but to develop resources for other jurisdictions' CJCCs as well. The 12 participating jurisdictions are:

1. Clinton County (Clinton), Iowa
2. Coconino County (Flagstaff), Arizona
3. City and County of Denver, Colorado
4. Eau Claire County (Eau Claire), Wisconsin
5. Hennepin County (Minneapolis), Minnesota
6. Johnson County (Olathe), Kansas
7. Louisville Metro Area, Louisville, Kentucky
8. Mecklenburg County (Charlotte), North Carolina
9. Multnomah County (Portland), Oregon
10. Pinellas County (Clearwater), Florida
11. Sacramento County (Sacramento), California
12. Thomas Jefferson Area, Charlottesville, Virginia

More details about the Network are available at the web link provided at the end of this article.

Each of the CJCCs in these jurisdictions has its own unique characteristics and is working on different projects to improve its local justice system. These CJCCs also share three common characteristics that enable them to maintain their effectiveness, and thus they serve as good examples for other CJCCs to follow. To learn more, read on.

"Before the creation of the National CJCC Network, there was no mechanism or opportunity to learn from some of the most advanced CJCCs and share this knowledge with CJCCs around the country to help them improve their ability to engage in meaningful and coordinated system improvement efforts."

—Elaine Borakove Nugent,  
President, Justice Management

## What Keeps CJCCs Functioning Effectively Over the Long-Haul?

A common thread among the highest-functioning CJCCs is that they tend to have three essential characteristics.

## 1. Appropriate and Engaged Membership Plus Effective Leadership

A high-functioning CJCC has participation from the elected or appointed executive-level heads of all relevant local justice system and community agencies. Membership typically includes the criminal court presiding judge, the sheriff, the district or state’s attorney, the chief public defender, the city police chief, the chief probation officer, the county manager and/or a county commissioner, the substance abuse/mental health director, and others who play a relevant role (e.g., the school superintendent). It is important that the agency heads themselves, and not their staff, attend and participate in the CJCC meetings and decision-making.

In terms of leadership, the most effective CJCC chairpersons usually have the right personality and position. That is, they tend to be good listeners and motivators and be well respected, organized, and decisive. They tend to occupy an influential justice system position, such as that of a chief judge, sheriff, or district attorney. Occasionally, persons from outside the justice system, such as the county manager or a county commissioner, make an effective chairperson.

The members and chairpersons of the CJCCs from the CJCC Network closely resemble the attributes described above.

## 2. Capable Criminal Justice Planning Staff

All 12 CJCC Network members, as well as the CJCCs in many other locations, have one or more staff persons whose job is solely to work for the CJCC. These staff members provide their committees with high-quality analytical information and operational support.

- They examine trends and prepare forecasts on system indicators, such as offenses, arrests, case filings, jail admissions and lengths of stay, and probation caseloads;
- They provide data analyses and summaries of evidence-based practices specific to the committee’s projects;
- They develop estimates of the impact of new legislation; and
- They help with creating meeting agendas and maintaining committee records, such as meeting minutes, committee bylaws, web pages, and progress reports.

“Staff conducts research that gives us the data we need to make decisions and to help guide us to a better way of conducting the business of justice.”

—Don Wick, Chief, City of Arvada  
Police Department

CJCC planning staff usually have a combination of good people skills and strong analytical skills. This means that they get along well with a variety of others, and they can analyze and present data and research in a way that informs committee members’ decision-

making. The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) will soon publish a new resource, *Guidelines for Staffing a Local Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee*. This guidebook provides details on how to find, administratively locate, and train staff with the needed skills, as well as giving suggestions for staff on how to get started and how to provide the CJCC with the information and ideas it needs.

### 3. A Structured, Data-Guided, Collaborative Policy Planning Process

The most effective CJCCs usually follow a process for addressing issues. This process has structure, in that certain steps are usually followed:

1. The CJCC identifies a problem (e.g., jail crowding).
2. The CJCC or a subcommittee assigns planning staff the task of collecting data that depict the current situation, how that has recently changed, and possible causes (e.g., pretrial inmates' length of stay has been increasing because of higher money bond amounts).
3. Committee members and staff generate possible courses of corrective action and identify the pros and cons of each option.
4. Committee members select the best course of action (e.g., adopt the practice of making risk-based pretrial release decisions).
5. Agencies enact new policies and practices, sometimes in a pilot project format.
6. Planning staff collect data to measure the extent of both desired and unanticipated changes that result from the new policies and practices.
7. The CJCC evaluates the results and determines whether to sustain the changes over the long term or to try another approach.

“Making policy from anecdotes and hearsay is inefficient and can cost taxpayers money. The Local Public Safety Coordinating Council provides accurate data and a forum for policy discussions. It brings the experts, stakeholders, and the community around a common table so everyone can benefit from the conversations and develop evidence-based policies and practices.”

—Judy Shiprack, County  
Commissioner, Multnomah County,  
Oregon

This process involves CJCC members collaborating to discuss the situation and their options, to share information, and to make decisions. The process also involves decision-making and evaluation based on empirical data and research. This data-guided, structured approach helps keep anecdotal and politically charged decision-making to a minimum. Additionally, because the process begins with the CJCC posing the question, “What should we do and why?” CJCC members are encouraged to focus on policy-level issues, which matches well with their qualifications. Finally, this process can be used to address more

than one issue at a time, such that all or most agencies have a stake in at least one initiative and outcome.

## Summary

As several jurisdictions have demonstrated—including the 12 inaugural members of the CJCC Network—CJCCs can be a very effective forum for finding long-term solutions and for managing justice system issues, such as jail crowding, court inefficiencies, and resource reductions, to name only a few. The committees bring together executive-level agency heads and enable them to use empirical data and research to make joint decisions to improve the local justice system's effectiveness and efficiency.

## Resources

Cushman, Robert C. (2002.) Guidelines for Developing a Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections.  
<http://nicic.gov/Library/017232>

Jones, Michael R. (2012, forthcoming.) Guidelines for Staffing a Local Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections.  
<http://nicic.gov/Library/026308>

Justice Management Institute, <http://www.jmijustice.org>

National Association of Counties, <http://www.naco.org>

Pretrial Justice Institute, <http://www.pretrial.org>

Criminal Justice Coordinating Council Network, <http://www.jmijustice.org/current-projects/current-projects/criminal-justice-coordinating-councils>

## About the Author

Michael R. Jones is a senior project associate at the Pretrial Justice Institute, where he assists states and local jurisdictions in understanding and implementing more legal and empirically-based pretrial policies and practices. He has worked as a criminal justice planner in Jefferson County, Colorado, where he was lead staff for the local CJCC. He has also worked as a technical resource provider for the National Institute of Corrections, providing justice system assessments and assisting local jurisdictions in developing or improving their CJCC and data-guided policy-making. He can be reached at [mike@pretrial.org](mailto:mike@pretrial.org).