
Background Research and Site Visit Methodology

APPENDIX B

To conduct this review, we collected information from a variety of sources. We began with a literature review of misdemeanor prosecution and court system practices. Then we gathered information from county and city attorneys, victim/witness assistance program staff, violations bureau staff, and district court personnel from around Minnesota, as well as from the State Court Administrator's Office. Some of the specific steps we took included holding a roundtable discussion, identifying indicators of effective and efficient prosecution offices, surveying local governments, and visiting select counties and cities. This appendix briefly describes these steps with the exception of our surveys, described in Appendix A.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

At the start of our review, we convened a meeting of attorneys, court administrators, judges, law enforcement representatives, public defenders, legislators, legislative staff, and other interested groups to discuss the key issues involved with misdemeanor prosecution in Minnesota. Thirty-four individuals from around the state participated. During the discussion, participants presented their ideas on the appropriate focus for this best practices review.

IDENTIFYING INDICATORS OF EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

We searched existing statutes, rules, and standards pertaining to non-felony prosecution to determine what is required and expected of prosecutors. From the many sources of information, originating within Minnesota as well as national organizations, we culled characteristics of effective and efficient prosecution offices. Then we reviewed our list of characteristics with prosecutors and others who work in the judicial system. We revised and added to the characteristics of effective and efficient prosecution

based on feedback from these practitioners. Appendix C lists the indicators we identified to measure effectiveness and efficiency in prosecution offices.

SITE VISITS

The examples of best practices in this report come from 11 Minnesota jurisdictions we either visited or called for in-depth interviews. During these interviews we collected information to describe individual practices and their advantages and disadvantages. We selected the jurisdictions based on performance measures we developed to help determine which jurisdictions were effective and efficient. (See Appendix C for information on the measures.) Because we could not visit all the counties and cities that ranked high on these measures, we chose a selection that represented different sizes and geographic locations of Minnesota local governments.

The site visits supplemented information we gathered from our surveys of prosecutors and gave us a first-hand look at specific elements of their operations, such as their victim/witness assistance programs. During these on-site interviews, prosecutors and others described practices including: how they were initiated; changes made since they were begun; problems solved; savings of time, money, personnel, or other resources; advantages and disadvantages; and transferability to other jurisdictions. From the interviews we were better able to ascertain the circumstances under which the practices were most appropriate.

We designed a standard questionnaire to use at each interview. The questionnaire included 15 open-ended questions to obtain general information on the practices as well as their specific uses. A copy of the questionnaire instrument is reprinted below.

Office of the Legislative Auditor
Misdemeanor Prosecution in Minnesota: A Best Practices Review
SITE VISIT QUESTIONNAIRE

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Jurisdiction: _____

Individuals Interviewed: _____ Title: _____ Phone: _____

Best Practices: _____

Information on Practices:

1. Describe the practice. What is it? How does it work?
2. When did you first implement the practice? How long have you used it?
3. Why did you initially implement the practice? What problems, if any, were you hoping to overcome?
4. Did implementing the practice solve your problem? Have you accomplished your goals? Why or why not?
5. Thinking back to when you began the practice, did you have any problems with startup?
6. Since beginning the practice, have you had any problems with it? Have you modified it in any way?
7. What were the startup costs of the practice? What are its ongoing costs?
8. Does the practice produce any type of savings — such as time, money, resources, hassle — for your jurisdiction or others involved?
9. Have you found other advantages from using the practice?
10. From your experience with the practice, what are its disadvantages or drawbacks?
11. Have you compared the practice with other options that might accomplish the same end? If yes, what comparisons have you made and what were the results?
12. Have you been able to monitor the practice to evaluate whether it is effective? If yes, in what ways have you evaluated the practice and what did you find out?
13. Do you think other counties or cities could also use the practice in their own jurisdiction? What characteristics or attributes does a jurisdiction need if it is to successfully use the practice?
14. What tips or advice would you offer to another city or county to help make this practice a success?
15. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments?