Criminal justice evaluation and performance monitoring in the ACT

Overview and introduction

Cite as: Boxall H, Yates S & Bartels L (2025). *Criminal justice evaluation and performance monitoring in the ACT: Overview and introduction*. Australian National University.

This document was prepared by POLIS: Centre for Social Policy Research, Australian National University (ANU), on behalf of the ACT Justice and Community Safety Directorate (JACS), for the *ACT Criminal Justice Data Capacity Project*. It should be considered in combination with the other resources prepared as part of this project, available at www.act.gov.au.

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of key staff in JACS, including ACT Corrective Services, the First Nations Justice Branch, Restorative Justice Unit and Justice Reform Branch; ACT Health; and Yeddung Mura. We also appreciate the advice of Associate Professors Sean Colishaw, Monash University, and Elfie Shiosaki, ANU, in preparing the resources for this project.

The Australian National University
TEQSA Provider ID: PRV12002 (Australian University) | CRICOS Provider Code: 00120C

Contents

Introduction

The ACT Government is committed to investing in evidence-based programs. There is an increasing expectation that organisations will be able to provide evaluation or performance data to show the positive impact of their services. Collecting data is understood to be part of service delivery, not a separately funded add-on activity.

To help, JACS has funded POLIS@ANU: The Centre for Social Policy Research (POLIS) to create practical guidelines and resources on evaluation. These explain:

- What evaluation is and why it matters.
- What data to collect and how to collect it.
- When to collect data to support evaluation and performance monitoring.

These guidelines are designed to help organisations collect and use data to assess the impact of their services. A number of activities have informed the development of these guidelines and resources, including desktop reviews and consultations. For more information refer to Table 1 in the additional resources.

Background

This work is part of the ACT Reducing Recidivism Research Collaboration, a partnership between JACS and POLIS to examine the impact of key initiatives under the ACT Government's *Reducing Recidivism in the ACT by 25% by 2025* Plan (the Plan).[1]

This ambitious goal – of reducing recidivism by 25% by 2025 – is to be measured by reference to the proportion of people re-sentenced and returned to prison within two years.[2] The Plan is underpinned by the following principles: restorative practices, cultural integrity, human rights, trauma-informed, evidence-informed and gender-informed. In September 2024, the ACT Government released *RR25by25 and Beyond: A Justice Reinvestment Strategy for the ACT*.[3] RR25by25 and Beyond builds on the successes of Phase 1 by continuing efforts to reduce recidivism, while also broadening the way success is measured. Rather than focusing solely on recidivism rates, it introduces a wider set of indicators to better capture the overall health and effectiveness of the justice system.

The Data Capacity Project, which includes the development of these guidelines and resources, is specifically referenced in the Phase 2 Plan as a key activity supporting justice reinvestment efforts.[4]

[1] ACT Government (2020). *RR25by25: Reducing Recidivism in the ACT by 25% by 2025, 2020-2023.* ACT Government..
[2] Ibid.
[3] ACT Government (2024). *RR25by25 and beyond: A Justice Reinvestment Strategy for the ACT – Reducing Recidivism in the ACT by 25% by 2025: Phase 2*. ACT Government.
[4] Ibid.

How should the guidelines be used?

POLIS has prepared a high-level introduction to evaluation ("Criminal justice evaluation and performance monitoring"), followed by seven guidelines, which are outlined on pages 3-4. The purpose of the guidelines is to build:

- your own and your service's knowledge about evaluation;
- your capacity to identify what data needs to be collected to help you demonstrate your program's success through evaluation, including how program success relates to the ACT Wellbeing Framework and Closing the Gap targets (see Guideline 6);
- your service's capacity to undertake evaluation and monitoring activities; and
- your service's capacity to facilitate evaluations that might be completed by other external organisations.

Some services may already have high levels of internal knowledge and capacity to undertake evaluation and monitoring activities and have systems set up exactly for this. If so, they may only use these guidelines and resources occasionally, for example, when thinking about changing data collection and systems.

There will also be services that have less knowledge and experience about evaluation and performance monitoring. These guidelines are intended to be a helpful resource for these services, to build internal capacity to undertake evaluation and performance monitoring. Where relevant, they can also support external evaluators to do these activities on your behalf.

The guidelines have been split into stages that can take your service through evaluation step-by-step. They are not intended to be prescriptive, and you do not have to use all of the guidelines, if they are not relevant to you and your service. It is also not expected that you will implement everything that is suggested in these guidelines. Instead, they are designed to provide some guidance that can be embedded in your systems and also adapted to suit your purposes.

An overview of each of the guidelines, what they cover and who they are targeted at is provided on pages 3-4. A guide for how the guidelines can be used at different stages of preparing for evaluation is also provided in Appendix A.

1 Program logic models

What does it cover?

- What is a program logic model?
- How can services develop their own program logic model?

Who is it for?

- Services that have not developed a logic model yet
- Services that want to refresh or revise existing logic models

2 Seeking consent from clients

What does it cover?

- Why is getting consent important?
- What if there are concerns about client capacity to consent?
- When and how should consent be collected?
- How should services record and store information about consent?

Who is it for?

- Services that do not have consent processes in place yet
- Services that want to review their consent processes to ensure they are ethical and consistent with the *Privacy Act 1988*

3 Client characteristics

What does it cover?

- Why collect detailed information about clients?
- What types of information should services be collecting?
- When should client information be collected?
- How should services be recording and storing information?
- How can services ensure that information is being collected consistently?

Who is it for?

- Services that are not collecting information about client characteristics yet
- Services that need some guidance about how to ask clients for sensitive information in a safe and respectful way
- Services that are interested in expanding what they currently collect about clients

4 Activities and outputs

What does it cover?

- What are activities and outputs?
- Why collect information about activities and outputs?
- What types of information should services be collecting?
- How should services be recording and storing information?
- How can services ensure that information is being collected consistently?

Who is it for?

- Services that are not collecting information about activities/outputs in a systematic way
- Services that are collecting information about activities but want to check they are collecting everything they need for evaluation
- Services that need support documenting the full range of activities they complete

5 Client feedback

What does it cover?

- What is client feedback?
- Why collect client feedback?
- When should services collect client feedback?
- What tools can services use to collect client feedback?
- How should services collect client feedback?
- Which clients should be asked to provide feedback?
- How can services increase client response rates?
- How should services store client feedback?

Who is it for?

- Services that are not yet measuring client satisfaction
- Services that want to check whether their client satisfaction measurement processes are best practice
- Services that want some advice about how to increase client participation in these feedback processes

6 Outcomes

What does it cover?

- What are outcomes?
- What outcomes should services measure?
- What tools should services use to measure outcomes?
- When should services collect outcomes data?

Who is it for?

- Services that are not collecting information about outcomes associated with their service
- Services that are already collecting some information but want guidance about how they could collect more data for evaluation purposes

7 Case studies

What does it cover?

- What is a case study?
- Why use case studies?
- What data should services use to create a case study?
- What is an appropriate unit of analysis for a case study?
- How can services protect client anonymity?
- What is a composite case study?

Who is it for?

- Services that are unfamiliar with the development of case studies for evaluation purposes

Additional resources: The development of the guidelines

To prepare the guidelines, we conducted a series of activities, including:

- a desktop review of relevant frameworks, evaluation tools and resources currently being used in the ACT, Australia and internationally;
- consultations with key government agencies; and
- a review of evaluations of criminal justice programs in Australia and internationally.

This evidence was used to select the most effective tools for these Guidelines.

More information about the processes is set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Activities that informed the development of the guidelines

Activity	Description
A desktop review of relevant frameworks in the ACT, Australia and internationally	At the outset of the project, we undertook a review of strategic plans and frameworks operating in the ACT and Australia, to identify the high-level outcomes that government departments had identified as a priority for improving the health and wellbeing of justice-involved people and Australians more generally. This included: • the Reducing Recidivism by 25% by 2025 Plan Evaluation Framework (ACT Government, 2020b) • the ACT Wellbeing Framework (ACT Government, 2020a) • the Closing the Gap (2024) targets.
Consultations with JACS and key service providers	During the initial stages of the project, we conducted consultations with a range of stakeholders in the ACT, to seek their views on initial drafts of the guidelines.
A literature review of evaluations of criminal justice programs in Australia and internationally	We reviewed the literature of evaluations of programs and services engaging with justice-involved people operating in Australia and internationally. This was to identify common outcomes that were considered as part of the evaluation, factors that appeared to influence engagement in services and their impact, and evaluation methods and tools.
A desktop review of evaluation tools and resources that are currently being used in the ACT, Australia and internationally	While undertaking activities to inform the development of these guidelines, we identified a range of tools currently being used by service providers that work with people involved in the criminal justice system suitable for evaluation and performance monitoring purposes. This includes the Footprints Survey administered by ACT Corrective Services, LSI-R and Australian Treatment Outcomes Profile (COQI, 2020), which are used by various criminal justice agencies, as well as international tools, like the Intermediate Outcomes Toolkit developed by the United Kingdom Probation and Prison Service [5].

[5] M Liddle et al. (2019). *Intermediate Outcomes Measurement Instrument (IOMI) Toolkit: Guidance notes.* HM Prison & Probation Service.

Appendix A: Workflow map - When should services use the guidelines?

Stage 1: Plan before you start collecting data

- [ ] **Clarify your evaluation purpose and scope** – identify what you want to know and why. (See *What is evaluation?*)
- [ ] **Map your outcomes** – develop (or refine your existing) program logic model. (See *Guideline 1*)
- [ ] **Ensure alignment** – check how outcomes link to the ACT Wellbeing Framework and Closing the Gap targets. (see *Guideline 6*)
- [ ] **Check consent requirements** – determine if you need client consent and how you will obtain it. (See *Guideline 2*)
- [ ] **Plan data storage and privacy** – set up secure, accessible, and compliant systems before collecting any data. (See *Guideline 3*)
- [ ] **Plan resources and roles** – assign responsibilities for collection, entry, analysis, and reporting.
- [ ] **Identify staff training needs** – plan for training in data collection methods, consent, cultural safety, and privacy.

Stage 2: Create your project plan

- [ ] **Select data sources** – decide what data you'll collect (quantitative and qualitative). (See *What is evaluation?*, and *Guidelines 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7*)
- [ ] **Design (and adapt) data collection tools** – surveys, interview guides, or feedback forms. (See *What is evaluation?*, and *Guidelines 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7*)
- [ ] **Develop data collection protocols** – decide on data collection points, and who will be responsible for collecting data.
- [ ] **Confirm storage protocols** – ensure they're ready to use and understood by all staff.
- [ ] **Document processes** – outline step-by-step procedures for consistency.
- [ ] **Seek ethics clearance (if needed)** – Seek ethics clearance from appropriate Board for the proposed processes. (See *Guideline 3*)
- [ ] **Identify champions** – Find champions in the organisation to help implement and drive change.

Stage 3: Collect data

- [ ] **Gather client characteristics data** – using the MDS categories. (See *Guideline 3*)
- [ ] **Record activities and outputs** – log service delivery consistently on an ongoing basis. (See *Guideline 4*)
- [ ] **Collect client feedback** – at agreed points, using accessible and culturally safe methods. (See *Guideline 5*)
- [ ] **Gather case study material** – with client consent and de-identification. (See *Guideline 7*)
- [ ] **Provide staff with ongoing support** – answer questions, troubleshoot, and offer refresher training as needed.

Stage 4: Maintain data quality

- [ ] **Check completeness and accuracy** – review data regularly for errors or gaps. Provide feedback to staff as required.
- [ ] **Review and improve data collection processes** – adapt forms, instructions, or systems where needed.
- [ ] **Keep staff skilled** – offer regular training and updates on best practice.
- [ ] **Securely store and back up data** – maintain confidentiality and legal compliance.

Stage 5: Use and share the data

- [ ] **Analyse results** – look for trends, outcomes, and service improvements.
- [ ] **Compare against planned outcomes** – using your program logic as a reference. (See *Guideline 6*)
- [ ] **Develop case studies** – showcase successes and lessons learned. (See *Guideline 7*)
- [ ] **Report to stakeholders** – present results clearly and link them to the ACT Wellbeing Framework and Closing the Gap targets.
- [ ] **Feed back into service design** – use findings to adapt and improve service delivery.