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DEVELOPING THE CAPACITY AND SKILLS FOR NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF A DRUG LAW ENFORCEMENT PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK

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Willis, Homel and Anderson (2010)

Plain English summary prepared by Roger Nicholas

Aims & Methodology

This report summarises the major findings from the second stage of a project to test the feasibility of a model framework for performance measurement for Australian drug law enforcement (DLE) agencies. It also provides advice on its national implementation. The first stage of the project identified four high level outcome measures for DLE in Australia, namely: reducing drug crime and drug-related crime; reducing organised crime; improving public health; and improving public amenity. This report summarises the results of implementation trials in four different DLE jurisdictions. The researchers conducted project fieldwork, undertook a review of the literature and consulted with DLE professionals to develop an implementation plan. The researchers also identified and discussed a range of key implementation issues.

Key findings

The researchers found that the large scale implementation of the proposed performance measurement framework is feasible and achievable, largely within existing resources. The national implementation plan should be conceived of as a series of jurisdictionally specific implementation strategies with an over-arching national reporting agenda. In other words, implementation should be the responsibility of specific state, territory and national DLE agencies, with a coordinated reporting mechanism capturing those core elements that would constitute the most important common features.

Application of the framework itself should be cost-neutral because many of the indicator data are already collected by law enforcement agencies. The researchers also recognised that, should the framework be implemented nationally, further work may need to be undertaken in some jurisdictions in relation to administrative arrangements, information technology systems and training.

In addition, they reported that:

- the framework provides a way in which the wider community can better understand the nature of the impacts that DLE can have upon issues such as drug-related public health and public amenity;

- the framework is capable of providing a way of generating jurisdictionally and locally responsive reporting and accountability systems, with a sufficiently robust and compatible core set of components that have the potential to form the basis of an ongoing national reporting system;

- the research indicated that there are significant, but currently fragmented and relatively unsystematic, efforts being directed at enhancing DLE performance measurement. It is possible to strengthen these without imposing an entirely new regime of data collection and reporting on already stretched management structures; and

- the measurement framework provides a vehicle for building new, more systematic processes from within existing structures and procedures. In this way, they reported that the framework could be an evolutionary and easily accepted way to generate sustainable performance management and accountability procedures.

The researchers identified a range of key issues associated with the implementation of the framework. These were:

- the importance of the law enforcement sector recognising the need for a new DLE performance measurement framework (including increasing awareness of the limitations of traditional measures of DLE and the benefits of more robust measures);
- the need to determine who is responsible for DLE performance measurement;
- outlining the major steps to developing a sound measurement framework;
- determining a realistic timeframe for national implementation of the framework;
- adequately resourcing the framework;
- giving appropriate consideration to key change management issues;
- considering a future evaluation of the framework itself; and
- key challenges for national implementation.

There were also some general lessons learned from this research that warrant consideration if national implementation of the framework is to be considered. Firstly an effective performance measurement system needs to be based on a sincere desire to use timely and accurate data to improve performance. Where there is concern about communicating unfavourable performance data, implementation of any performance measurement system will fail. As such, measurement systems designed to focus on performance improvements (as opposed to instruments of control) are much more easily accepted than systems designed exclusively for accountability purposes.

Secondly, performance measurement must take place for the purpose of supporting management decisions and not just counting for counting's sake. If performance data are not used for managing performance, then the system merely becomes a costly and elaborate exercise in accounting.

Thirdly, superimposing an entirely new measurement system steeped in management jargon almost guarantees the death of that system. To be effective, the system needs to accurately reflect the culture and practices of the organisation into which it is being introduced. To this end, it is important to involve management through to operational staff right from the start in defining operational goals and in developing appropriate performance measurement systems. This helps to 'buy-in' staff support.

Fourthly, success in DLE performance will mean that goals and targets will probably change. Therefore the measurement system must be able to readily change and adapt to new priorities and outcomes.

Finally, a DLE performance measurement system needs to be built into strategic planning processes to help establish accountability for the measures and to ensure that they are both reported and used for performance improvement.

A full copy of this report is available on the NDLERF website at www.ndlerf.gov.au.