

Application for Technical Assistance to Build Capacity for Cost-Benefit Analysis in Criminal Justice

With funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), the Vera Institute of Justice's National Cost-Benefit Knowledge Bank for Criminal Justice (CBKB) project will help four jurisdictions build their capacity to use cost-benefit analysis (CBA) in criminal justice policymaking and planning.

Vera's technical assistance aims to build the capacity of sites to conduct credible cost-benefit studies and other economic assessments and, more importantly, to apply CBA techniques and results to justice planning and policy making. CBA capacity building requires the development of infrastructure, human resources, and processes. This includes:

- Site-specific data, particularly around costs, program impacts, and justice system operations;
- People with the analytic skills and technical know-how to perform CBAs;
- People with the policy development and communication skills necessary to share CBA information with key stakeholders, e.g., elected officials and criminal justice practitioners, and more general audiences;
- Decision makers who are interested in and willing to consider the full array of costs and benefits when assessing policies, programs, and practices; and
- Processes for: requesting CBAs; getting buy-in on CBA results; using CBA information in planning, budgeting, and decision making; and monitoring investments to see if they are achieving economic and social returns.

For more information on CBKB, please visit <http://www.cbkb.org>.

What sites will receive

Please note: This application is for technical assistance only. No direct funding will be provided to sites that are selected to receive technical assistance.

Vera will provide technical assistance to four cities or counties over a twelve month period. Each team will receive up to three on-site visits from staff of Vera's Cost-Benefit Analysis Unit along with ongoing support via online trainings, phone calls, and customized materials, and one to two multisite meetings to foster peer-to-peer learning across sites.

Successful capacity building would result in a site being more able and willing to weigh policies and programs using CBA information. Ideally, sites would also include CBA as an important factor in a better-informed and sustained process of decision making.

Measures of success include increases in the relevant data available for use in CBA, more skills and knowledge in conducting CBAs, more interest from decision makers in using CBA to weigh

choices, the establishment of processes to bring CBA into decision making, and examples of CBA results being considered as part of planning and policymaking.

Expectations and responsibilities of sites

- Designated point of contact
- Development of a working group
- Engagement of key stakeholders, including criminal justice officials and practitioners, city/county administrators, budget officials, legislators, and other policy makers
- Assignment of staff to develop technical skills to perform CBAs
- Commitment to securing necessary data, particularly information on costs
- Participation in on- and off-site meetings and TA-related activities, including the development of a TA plan
- Willingness to share information with peer sites and the criminal justice field via interviews, blog posts, case studies, webinars, or presentations on conference panels

Eligibility

Eligible applicants under this initiative are limited to local governments (i.e., cities and counties) and federally recognized Indian tribes (as determined by the Secretary of the Interior) that have a demonstrated commitment to developing CBA capacity. Vera and BJA will select up to four sites.

How to apply

Program narrative (Attachment 1)

Please address the following points and submit as an MS Word or PDF file attachment to your e-mail application. Please limit the narrative to 15 double-spaced pages.

- **Interest in CBA:** Provide background on how your jurisdiction became interested in CBA. Describe what your jurisdiction hopes to gain by having an increased CBA capacity and how you anticipate using CBA related information in decision making. Provide examples of demonstrated interest in developing CBA capacity or using CBA results, e.g., participation in trainings, the commissioning of CBA studies, the selection of programs based on CBA information, etc. Describe up to three specific criminal justice projects, policies, or initiatives that your jurisdiction would like CBA results to inform, and why. These projects may target a specific criminal justice function (for instance, pretrial services, jails, probation, courts, or law enforcement) or have a cross-agency or system wide focus (for instance, information sharing); projects may be planned, currently in operation, or near completion.
- **Existing capacity:** Describe how your jurisdiction currently assesses the effectiveness of its programs and projects, how it collects and analyzes criminal justice related data, and which staff carry out those functions. Explain how information about performance and outcome data are currently used in planning and budgeting processes.
- **Participation in TA:** Identify individuals in your jurisdiction who will serve as part of the local TA working group and describe what their expected contribution to the working

group will entail. Working group members should include a budget official or fiscal officer; an elected official; researchers or analysts who will potentially perform CBAs; and representatives from relevant criminal justice agencies, including planning, research, or coordinating bodies. Members will participate in and provide assistance with various capacity building efforts as well as the overall planning and coordination of the TA. Members will also designate a point of contact to be a liaison to Vera staff and the local working group; the point of contact may or may not be a member of the working group. Include any information about which leaders in your jurisdiction are supportive of using CBA in planning and policymaking.

- **Sustainability:** Provide a description of any anticipated efforts or actions to sustain the development of CBA capacity along with any foreseeable challenges.

Letters of commitment (Attachment 2)

- Each member of the local TA working group must sign and date a letter of commitment, which must be attached to the application e-mail. The letters should demonstrate the members' interest, willingness, and availability to participate actively in the working group.

Additional supporting documents (Attachment 3)

- **Supporting documentation:** Applicants are encouraged but not required to attach additional materials or documents in support of the application, which may include but are not limited to research and evaluation partnerships, previous or existing cross-system collaborations, and examples of data driven policies.
- **Letters of support:** Applicants are encouraged but not required to attach letters of support from relevant officials in their jurisdiction who have not already been designated as members of the TA working group. The letters should specify how CBA will help your jurisdiction and demonstrate support for incorporating CBA into criminal justice planning and policymaking processes.

Deadline

All applications are due by 7:00 p.m. EST on Thursday, February 23, 2012, and must be submitted via e-mail to cbau@vera.org. Complete applications must include a program narrative, letters of commitment, and any additional supporting documents.

Contact information

For assistance with application submissions, contact Desiré Vincent, project coordinator for the Cost-Benefit Analysis Unit at the Vera Institute of Justice, at 212-376-3042 or dvincent@vera.org. For assistance with the requirements or any additional questions, contact Tina Chiu, director of technical assistance at the Vera Institute of Justice, at 212-376-3038 or tchiu@vera.org.