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Grants-R-Us

Inside a Federal Grant-Making Research Agency

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In this article, the author reviews the process by which the National Institute of Justice, the largest funder of criminological and criminal justice research in the United States, operates in the adjudication, dissemination, and monitoring of research grants. I also analyze the functions of social science analysts/grant managers and the role of potential and actual grantees. By funding the bulk of research on criminal justice, the institute plays a key role in linking research to current policy issues and in shaping the direction that the field takes. This analysis is based on my experience working in the agency for the Office of Research and Evaluation, as well as a review of relevant academic research.

Almost every developed or industrialized country has a number of public (government) agencies existing at the federal, state/provincial, and local level that conduct or fund research. This work is ostensibly conducted to give bureaucracies, politicians, and the public a better understanding of social, economic, and political issues, to accelerate knowledge acquisition and building, and/or to evaluate government policies and practices to either continue and/or formulate new and improved directions.

Needless to say, there is considerable variability in where these government research bodies exist in the overall government structure, how they are administered, and who conducts the research, as well as in their size and the types of research they do. In the United States, for example, many well-known federal agencies provide grants and contracts to researchers. Although occasional articles about the inner workings of these government bodies have been produced, rarely have scholarly treatments been conducted.

This article steps into this gap to focus on one such research agency, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ).¹ For almost three decades, NIJ, which is part of the Department of Justice, has been at the center of criminological and

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criminal justice research funding in the United States. And because so many countries look to the United States to see what research has merit and which practices work, NIJ's influence extends beyond the nation's boundaries. Indeed, most of the important criminal justice research that has been conducted over the past 30 years was sponsored in whole or in part by NIJ or its predecessor, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA).

Although a variety of methodologies could be used to understand the inner dynamics of NIJ, I use the method of retrospective ethnography.² By this, I mean the reconstruction of experience, organized so that it informs a rigorous analysis. Through this study, I anchor my experience in the agency, review the scholarly literature on the role of academics in government agencies, and then focus on how NIJ works, paying special attention to the role of insiders (those who work there) and outsiders (those who receive grants and contracts from the agency). I conclude with a brief commentary on the suitability of employment in NIJ and how the agency might be improved.

ANCHORING THE ETHNOGRAPHY

From September 30, 1995, to June 28, 1998, I worked as a social science analyst for the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) of NIJ. I came to NIJ shortly after the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (Crime Act or Bill) of 1994 (P.L. 103-322) was passed. Not since the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 (P.L. 90-35) had so much money been infused into the criminal justice system in the United States.³ Passed September 13, 1994, the Crime Act earmarked \$30.2 billion over 6 years for such programs as the addition of 100,000 new police officers to the streets, continued implementation of community policing, enforcement of the Brady Bill, the building of prisons and boot camps, limitations on prisoner appeals, expansion of the death penalty to major federal crimes, reduction of domestic violence, and bans on assault rifles.⁴ Along with these efforts, a certain percentage of the Act's funds were set aside for research and evaluation studies. The majority of this funding came to NIJ.

I was certain that my recruiters knew that I was considered by many in my profession to be a critical criminologist (e.g., Ross, 1998); in fact, my first edited book, outlining the criminogenic nature of government policies and practices, had recently been published (Ross, 1995a). I thought that the staff and management of NIJ were perhaps more enlightened than many of my colleagues alleged; I was hoping I would be able to do research on the delivery of criminal justice services and make research more relevant to the agency's detractors.⁵ I had also finished an edited book on violence in Canada (Ross, 1995b) and was well aware that both violence and comparative/international research were areas that NIJ was interested in exploring. I was most likely naive about the permanence of organizational culture despite changes in leadership, particularly in government research enterprises.

I was hired along with about 12 other individuals with varying degrees of knowledge, expertise, skills, and credentials. I, for example, had come to NIJ after taking a leave of absence and then resigning from a tenure track assistant professor job at a Carnegie IIA Research University. Unlike the majority of my cohort, I began my work at the institute with an established scholarly record.⁶

Everyone in my cohort was informed that NIJ was a place where we could use our creative energies, where important movers and shakers in the field of criminology and criminal justice (both researchers and practitioners) passed through; we could do cutting edge research, as well as have an intimate role in helping shape the field. Most important to me, I was promised ample opportunities to pursue my own individual research agenda. My recruiters told us that in the history of the agency, this was probably the best time to work there. This was largely attributable, we were told, to Jeremy Travis, the new director, who unlike previous executives, actively encouraged staffers to do their own research. When we asked about our responsibility for managing grants, we were told that this would simply be "background noise."⁷

Although having us conduct self-initiated research may have been Travis's intent, it slowly became clear that our primary purpose was to "get the money out the door," and managing the grants and contracts that were in our respective inherited, delegated, and, in some cases, requested portfolios.⁸ We were hired with the research-sounding title, social science analyst, but in fact, we were grant managers.⁹ In other words, although in-house research was desired, resources (i.e., employees' time) were not protected or set aside to achieve this objective.¹⁰

It slowly became clear to me that NIJ did not have a lot of experience dealing with employees who conducted research and had it published and presented in academic venues. For example, during the fall, when I first began working there, periodic efforts to develop an in-house research and publication process and policy were initiated, part of which included staffer proposals to senior management. Few, however, were approved, and of those that received the go-ahead, even fewer were completed.¹¹ In another example of inexperience with staff research, after an article of mine was printed in a peer-reviewed journal, I received a memo from the NIJ director (and the sentiment was echoed by the director of ORE), asking, in an incredulous tone, if this was the official position of NIJ. It was clear that they had not read the article or had overlooked the disclaimer that the agency almost always puts on the research it publishes: "The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Institute of Justice nor the Department of Justice." In fact, as I later learned, most of the professionals who work for NIJ do not conduct research. Why? The agency, despite its public face, is not oriented this way.¹² Another way of looking at this situation is that experts were hired to manage the research agenda set by the director and his assistants, with lip service given to their own research agendas and stature in the field.

WHAT THE ACADEMIC LITERATURE SAYS ABOUT SOCIAL SCIENTISTS WORKING FOR THE GOVERNMENT

Although I was trained as a political scientist, I had taken courses in public administration and written and conducted a considerable amount of research on one of the most pervasive of governmental agencies (i.e., police). However, I was unfamiliar with the literature on the role of academics in the bureaucracy.

In fact, a handful of research has been conducted in this area, primarily focusing on the role of sociologists working in governmental settings. Merton (1968), for example, wrote a classic article, "Role of the Intellectual in Public Bureaucracy." After defining what he considers to be an intellectual (generally someone with a Ph.D.), Merton identifies three types that work for the government. First, those who are "alienated from the assumptions, objectives, and rewards of private enterprise" work for government because they believe they might be able to "make a difference" in the creation and implementation of policies. Second, technicians who "are indifferent to any given social policies but whose sentiments and values are broadly those of prevailing power groups" (p. 267) take government jobs. Finally, there are the unattached intellectuals "who in time of acute social crisis . . . swarm temporarily into public bureaucracies . . . they are probably less constrained by bureaucratic pressures. For them, there is the ready alternative of return to private life" (p. 268). In sum, Merton documents how difficult it is for intellectuals to make a meaningful contribution in a research capacity in the context of government service. He concedes that "if the intellectual is to play an effective role in putting his knowledge to work, it is increasingly necessary that he become a part of a bureaucratic power-structure" (p. 271). In other words, Merton suggests that those academics contemplating a government research career will eventually be co-opted.

Alternatively, one could turn to Riley (1967) to understand a multitude of problems that sociologists who enter nonacademic settings experience. He emphasizes the role problems of academics in the government sector, including problems concerning ambiguity and status.

An even smaller subset of research reviews and analyzes the role of scholars or academically trained individuals working in criminal justice agencies. Brownstein (1990) examines the difficulties he encountered being a qualitatively trained sociologist working in a quantitatively focused state-level criminal justice agency. In a companion piece, Brownstein (1991) describes how research findings generated in part by a state agency responsible for collecting data on crime were used and interpreted differently by policy makers. Similarly, Brownstein and Goldstein (1990) argue that researchers should have a greater role in the policy-making process than what is traditionally afforded them.

Some literature has also been written about the new type of criminologist or criminal justice researcher that has emerged during the past three decades, an ideal type with which I was generally unfamiliar. According to Miller (1996),

Though traditional sociologists might be expendable, an eminently durable new type of sociologist-criminologist has emerged on the scene. Often lacking hands-on experience in the Criminal Justice system, they nevertheless provide academic and scientific cover for politically driven anticrime policies. . . . This marriage of criminological research to politics helped governmental policy makers to avoid the uneasiness that potentially "value-loaded" conclusions might bring. Criminologists set themselves the task of carefully sifting, twisting, and pounding ambiguous realities into forced dualities to fit the political metaphors that fed a "melodrama of monsters and innocents" while assuring policy makers that "there are no complex issues and none that threaten." (pp. 143-144)

Miller adds that during the 1980s,

American criminological research came to resemble that generated for the Pentagon during the Vietnam War—focused on narrow issues for technical purposes in the service of ideology. . . . Indeed, as the Vietnam conflict wound down, many of those individuals and research organizations that had worked mostly for the Defense Department migrated to criminal justice and began receiving substantial Justice Department contracts and grants. (pp. 146-147)

This characterization described many of the individuals and firms that were successful in receiving NIJ grant and contract money. Criminal justice research, in this context, is seen as a business and/or career opportunity and not necessarily as a means of improving society or effecting progressive policy changes.

Finally, Clear (1994), in a passionate book on the difficulties of incarceration in the United States, touches on NIJ's political role and how criminologists are willing to support this agenda. Among other items, Clear, although noting the possibility of other interpretations (p. 95), reviews NIJ's reaction to a controversial study produced by Joan Petersilia, which produced results allegedly counter to then-current government criminal justice policy. This response included the internal commissioned paper that refuted Petersilia's findings. Clear also mentions how during the 1970s and 1980s,

Criminologists were . . . responsive to the financial marketplace for research. It is a bit of an overstatement, but not much of one, to say that any American Criminologist desiring to write about penal policy—especially anyone trying to obtain research funding and to establish a reputation in the field—had to be interested in the [federal] punishment-and-control agenda. Those who disputed the agenda had to find ways to incorporate their research into its general call, since these were the primary studies being funded, at least by government. (p. 97)

Clear adds,

Their work legitimated policy by placing the exalted mantel of scientific approval upon it. This role was central to the political agenda of the key elected officials, for it gave them a two-punch ability to counteract the longstanding liberal tradition that held sway among so-called "experts." (p. 97)

Through the above-mentioned authors, Brownstein, Brownstein and Goldstein, Miller, and Clear, we get a glimpse of the relationship between scholarly research and government policy in the criminal justice area. More revealing is an examination of the day-to-day operations of a government agency that funds criminal justice research.

WHAT IS NIJ?

Although it is a federal agency, NIJ traditionally sponsors research aimed at helping the delivery of services and improving practices in the fields of corrections, policing, the courts, sentencing, and crime prevention at the state and local levels. The institute is part of the Office of Justice Programs (OJP), one of seven branches of the Department of Justice.¹³ In addition to NIJ, OJP is composed of six other major divisions: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Executive Office of Weed and Seed, Office of Victims of Crime, and the Violence Against Women Grants Program Office.¹⁴

NIJ grew out of the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, which was established during the 1960s as an outgrowth of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (United States, 1967, chapter 13). The agency is currently divided into three divisions: ORE, the Office of Dissemination, and the relatively new Office of Science and Technology. NIJ is well known in criminal justice circles for widely disseminating, free of charge, a wide range of research reports that go by a number of names including Research in Brief, Research in Action, or Research in Progress. Much of this material is available through the World Wide Web and/or can be mailed to individuals from one of the lists maintained by one of NIJ's contractors.

NIJ encourages their grantees to present their findings in public forums, such as academic conferences, and to publish their findings in academic journals. And a considerable amount of their work is printed in peer-reviewed journals and through NIJ vehicles. Researchers produce a variety of products, including reports to sponsoring agencies, papers presented at conferences, congressional testimony, and media interviews.

Unlike many governmental or quasi-governmental organizations that conduct or sponsor research (e.g., the National Institutes of Health [NIH], National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH], the National Science Foundation [NSF]), NIJ is intimately tied to the administration. Its director is appointed by the President, and as part of the executive branch, NIJ is accountable to a variety of constituencies. Because NIJ is administered by a political appointee (approved by Congress), the leadership must address the policies of the President. Likewise, the agency recognizes that it has a constituency beyond the President and Congress. Thus, NIJ tries to blend both practitioner and academic concerns into their funding decisions, conferences, and lobbying efforts. Although part of its

mandate is to do basic research, a disproportionate share of the Institute's activities involve applied research.¹⁵

NIJ directors are nominated by each new presidential administration and confirmed by Congress. The director of the agency responds both to the head of OJP, who is formally an assistant attorney general (i.e., currently Laurie Robinson) and to the attorney general (i.e., currently Janet Reno). A graduate of New York University Law School who clerked for Supreme Court Justice Ruth Ginsberg, Travis had been an attorney with the New York City Police Department and later worked for the liberal Vera Institute of Justice, a well-known and respected New York City research outfit. He was one of the first directors to come to NIJ with a research background. Moreover, somewhat like President Clinton, he had charismatic appeal and the right connections.

To promote research and its mission, NIJ regularly sponsors and/or organizes conferences, often cynically referred to by staffers and attendees as parties, love fests, or love-ins, where researchers and practitioners are either invited to speak on particular topics or NIJ-sponsored research they have conducted (often funded by NIJ) or to hear others present their findings. NIJ has a tendency to invite those individuals who would support its work and who would not criticize its activities, personnel, or the research it sponsored. Unfortunately, this has been a barrier to creative decision making and critical thinking about criminological and criminal justice problems.

There is considerable variety in the type of venues for these sorts of things. Some were big affairs, like the annual Research and Evaluation Conference meeting held each July, where those interested in the type of research NIJ funds and in future funding opportunities would attend. Alternatively, the agency held focus groups, cluster conferences, or seminar series to collect information from researchers and practitioners. These provided ideas, trial balloon programs, and initiatives, and they also served the cause of impression management, reconfirming to the rest of the DOJ and the public that NIJ was doing something about the pressing crime-related problems of the day. Although the organization prided itself on being one where employees could enrich their knowledge, staff participation in these events was limited. Who, inside NIJ, attended the conferences, and the degree that any attendee was allowed to speak were controlled. For many of these events, staffers were only given observer status. They were allowed to attend and watch the conversation unfold, but they were asked to remain silent. Alternatively, they chaired panels but did not present papers of their own. It was argued that these meetings were necessary because they cut down on information costs. In other words, staffers got the impression that Washington bureaucrats were too busy to read research findings, and these gatherings helped them to get up to speed.

NIJ is located in downtown Washington, D.C., not far from the other divisions of the DOJ. Staff resembled nomads. In the 3 years that I worked there, the agency shifted its physical location three times from 633 Indiana, to 1110 Vermont, and then to 820 7th Street. As a partial consequence of these arrange-

ments, I moved from a shared office to a separate office that was nicely hidden on the top floor beside an elevator shaft serving a 13-story building, to another shared office, and then to a cubicle in an open concept office. Privacy was almost nonexistent for the majority of my cohort. Administrators were also fond of tinkering with the organization chart by shifting, creating, and reconstructing work groups, new divisions, and portfolios for which social science analysts were responsible.

Needless to say, NIJ is not the only place criminologists and criminal justice researchers can get grant support. Both government and nongovernmental organizations (e.g., foundations) fund criminal justice research. Among the governmental organizations that devote some of their resources to criminological and criminal justice research are the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA), the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), the NSF, and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Some of the foundations that have made criminal justice grants available include Annie Casey, Ford, Guggenheim, and Soros. Each grant-making organization has its own criteria for selecting, monitoring, and disseminating the findings of researchers. In fact, like any organization worried about survival and maintenance, NIJ competes with other federal agencies (e.g., NIDA, CDC, and ONDCP, particularly in the violence and drug control arenas) for research dollars to administer or distribute. Although in Washington, D.C., there are a considerable number of relevant government research agencies, NIJ stands out as the most prominent one in criminal justice research.

INSIDERS: WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY DO

Understanding who works for NIJ and what they do is very difficult. Formally, employees occupy a public sector rank referred to as a GS level. During my tenure, social scientist analysts occupied a level of GS 11 to GS 15. Nominally, these positions vary in the qualifications needed to perform the job (i.e., type of academic degree obtained, length of government service, etc.), duties required, and compensation. More important, there was a distinction, albeit artificial, between those employees who were relatively new and those who had been around for a considerable period of time. Most of the longer term employees (often referred to as "lifers"), although generally friendly, competent, and knowledgeable, were not particularly well versed in the theoretical, methodological, and historical underpinnings of the field of criminology and criminal justice. With the exception of a few, these individuals had not published in academic journals or other scholarly venues. They had derived their power, not only inside the agency but outside, from attending a multitude of conferences and having good channels of communication with the academic and consulting grapevine. This network and agency experience allowed lifers access to professional information (i.e., scuttlebutt, rumors, gossip, etc.) and a history that they could draw on to remember who was funded in any given year and who was

rejected. In essence, and much like avid sports fans or spectators, they knew who was doing research, on what topic, and what their professional reputation was.

I soon learned that, more often than not, individuals come to NIJ for a brief period of time. Most of these employees see their work at the agency as a good temporary career move. Among my cohort were a handful of recently graduated and soon to graduate (all but dissertations) Ph.D.s, a master's degree graduate, some individuals in the middle of their Ph.D. programs, a couple of employees on loan through the Intergovernmental Personal Act, one former police administrator, and a law graduate ready to write the bar exams. During my time at NIJ, members of this cohort resigned to take other jobs, returned to academic settings or research consulting firms; were transferred to different divisions of NIJ or were promoted inside ORE; stayed and were promoted; or remained in their jobs. Others were either fired or used the institute as a stepping-stone to the private sector.

Staffers had different opinions about the role of the institute and their part in it. Some saw NIJ as a consulting agency, helping OJP make decisions and also facilitating the rest of the DOJ to interpret research and to convince the public not only that the federal government implements programs, but also that these programs are based on some type of scientific evaluation. Others believed that NIJ is simply a pass-through organization, a kind of corporate welfare provider, part of the spoils system whereby tax dollars (in this case, earmarked for research and development) are taken from one place and given to another, whether that be to research consulting corporations, universities, individuals, or states and Congressional districts whose representatives or constituents believe that they are entitled to a share of the pie or who feel they have been underfunded in the government research arena. In fact, some senators and members of Congress, believing that their districts are entitled to governmental research money, would call or write NIJ to ensure that a grant application had been received and/or to lobby for its funding. Much of this perspective conveniently fits into the notion that criminal justice is, more or less, a business and as such an important part of the U.S. economy (e.g., Christie, 1994). This state of affairs led some of the more cynical staffers to suggest that if the institute changed its name to Grants- R-Us (a play on the name of the warehouse-like retail toy store, Toys-R-Us), it would be more reflective of what the agency does.

NIJ was also an organization where process took precedence over outcome. Appropriately, we were concerned with maintaining the appearance that the funding of grants was reviewed in a dispassionate and objective fashion, but measures were not implemented to determine the impact of research findings on the field. In fact, each time insiders proposed that an outcome evaluation of some or all of the research funded by the agency be conducted, many lifers and senior personnel became uneasy. This state of affairs led many staffers and outsiders to become skeptical both about NIJ's role and its impact.

Social science analysts, grant managers, or program managers (as some preferred to be called)¹⁶ spent the majority of their time performing bureaucratic and

clerical functions. This kind of work does not really require creative or intellectual skills. And although a Ph.D. is generally required to be hired for this occupational title, based on the type of work they do, social science analysts/grant managers are overeducated. A postgraduate education is theoretically necessary because grant managers would then be able to use their expertise to understand findings, spot research design problems, identify faulty analyses, and provide general and substantive advice. Rarely, however, was this necessary because the outside peer reviewers are generally capable of spotting this sort of difficulty. Finally, working at NIJ exposes its workers to a narrow picture of the field. The majority of criminologists work in settings (e.g., academic) where grant funding is not a priority.

Formal training programs for staff were rare. Most training was done on the job through a process of trial and error and/or by consultation with more senior personnel about how to respond to particular situations. In other words, training of staff was kept to a minimum, with occasional brown bag discussions provided by senior staff members. With considerable frustration, some recruits found old policy and procedure manuals, dusted them off, and did their best to learn at least the official rules. Needless to say, shortly before I left NIJ, after staff made repeated pleas for grant management training, senior management contracted with an outside firm to deliver grant management training. By then, the relevance of the advice was questionable.

The functions of social science analysts include from *least often* to *most often*: showing the flag (i.e., representing NIJ in public forums), drafting Requests for Proposals (RFPs), organizing meetings and conferences, managing the peer review process and in-house discussions, redbooking (administrative processing), responding to requests for information, monitoring grants, and attending a plethora of meetings. First, on any given day in Washington (and beyond), meetings that are directly or indirectly connected to the field of criminology and criminal justice take place. In most public discussions of criminology and criminal justice, NIJ, like other branches of government, wants to be perceived as an important player. This means that staff were asked to attend these interagency meetings, work groups, conferences, and interest group and advocacy organization meetings that discussed criminal justice issues. In this manner, the agency would be represented and stay informed.

Second, periodically, social science analysts were asked to draft parts of or entire RFPs. Also referred to as solicitations, these documents present the agency's desire to receive grant or contract proposals on specific topics or for particular types of evaluations. RFP writing involves concisely stating the needs of the agency and requesting researchers to submit proposals in a particular fashion and at a given time. Although this was deemed to be the more intellectual challenge of the job, grant managers were often reduced to secretaries and clerks as many players in the chain of command provided input on this document: Most of the time, it bore little resemblance to the original staffer's draft.

Third, occasionally, staff were asked to develop conference or meeting agendas. This usually meant selecting and/or contacting appropriate speakers and attendees and negotiating the topics on which they would present. Many of the presenters and attendees were formerly or recently funded by the agency. After the initial plans were designed and approved by senior management, the package was usually turned over to a contractor. It became especially ironic when staffers were denied requests to attend the conferences, held in Washington, that they had organized or at which their grantees were speaking.

Fourth, grant managers were the leaders in managing the peer review process. In general, this involved scheduling the various tasks to be performed, securing a balance of academics (also known as technical people) and practitioners to review the proposals on a given solicitation or part thereof, then presenting the findings of this group to senior staff. The adjudication process initially seemed rational, until staff discussions, interpersonal issues, the senior administrators, and the director got involved.

At a number of critical points, proposals can get rejected: Especially important, peer reviewers may believe that the project is not worth funding, and in-house staff may have difficulties with the prospectus. Regardless, the director has the discretionary power to make final funding decisions. His or her own agenda and interpretations of the needs of OJP and DOJ are important influences on the process. These less publicly visible actions were major factors in deciding who got funding and who did not. Managing the peer review process, championed by our superiors as a major benefit of the job, became known as "having the opportunity to shape the field." Staff, however, frequently complained that factors other than scientific merit played a key role in funding decisions. Furthermore, administrators and lifers were frequently worried that a member of Congress would vote down or cut back the agency's appropriation. This may be why it appeared as if there was a certain amount of "pork" given to states and congressional districts. The agency was also concerned that important criminal justice professional interest groups would feel left out. This sometimes resulted in the funding of marginal proposals. Researchers from regions of the country that were rarely funded and investigators from underrepresented minority groups were also considered for potential funding, although perhaps not as often as some staff and outsiders wished.

Based on my conversations with employees of other government research agencies and investigators who have secured grants from other bodies, NIJ's grant adjudication process is in sharp contrast to the methods used at the NIH, NIMH, or NSF. At these agencies, the scientific merit of the proposed studies is the most important consideration in funding projects. Proposals face a rigorous and extremely demanding process that is generally divorced from the input of the agency's staff. In general, in these settings, staff only have discretion to fund projects that fit the research program's mission, and only if the proposals get high scores on scientific merit.¹⁷

Fifth, redbooking is the process by which grants that have been approved are clerically and administratively processed. Essentially a redbook is a big red three-ring binder that includes the applicant's proposal and all assurances with which it must comply. Signoffs from OJP's Office of the General Council, Office of the Controller, Office of Congressional and Public Affairs, and Office of Civil Rights are important to coordinate. This activity consumes a considerable amount of employees' energy at various points in the fiscal year and particularly each September. It was a pressure-filled and frustrating time, extremely labor intensive, and the work served to legally, ethically, and politically protect the institution. Although staffers were told that electronic redbooking was imminent, each year it appeared that new forms had been inserted into the process, and new approvals were needed. September was important because the agency's money had to be spent by October 1 (the end of the fiscal year). Although grants might be approved, the financial review could drag on for months because at that time, coordination was out of a grant manager's hands and was done between the Office of the Controller and the university or consulting firm that had proposed the research outlined in the grant or contract. Alternatively, social science analysts were responsible for sending out the rejections, although this could take months, considering that they were dependent on a contractor or limited clerical staff.

Sixth, a large portion of time was spent responding to requests for information; writing memos and/or e-mails; reviewing proposals, progress reports, and final reports; and/or coordinating office meetings. Requests typically came from supervisors or other offices inside OJP. Directors' or front office inquiries had a preferential place in the queue. Typically, the director of NIJ or the assistant attorney general (OJP) or the attorney general (DOJ) would be making a trip, and a message was sent out to all the agencies to determine if they were managing any grants in that location. Alternatively, staff were asked to prepare a briefing on one or more of the grants they managed. Sometimes, follow-ups to questions that had been raised in departmental meetings were requested. Finally, members of Congress or the Senate occasionally asked the director if we had any research on particular crime-related subjects, and we were directed to forward this research to the concerned party.

Seventh, monitoring grants took up a considerable amount of time. When grantees want to do something out of the ordinary, they must make a formal request. Social science analysts examine the rationale for the change and determine whether it is appropriate. Frequently, this involved a good deal of negotiation, with the understanding that there was little we could do to force grantees to comply with our individual and agency preferences. If the grantee's request conformed to the OJP guidelines, then analysts were expected to produce a Grant Adjustment Notice (GAN). A good proportion of time as a grant manager was consumed submitting GANs on behalf of grantees. This was often a comedy of errors. GANs need to be signed by a number of supervisors inside the agency

and by budget officers in the Office of the Comptroller. These (like memos and e-mails) may linger on individuals' desks for weeks, or the language requesting the GAN may not be in the appropriate bureaucratic form and have to be changed several times. Initially, many computers were not set up to properly print these forms. So the work was delegated to secretaries who had the proper configuration on their computer and then sent to the budget office. This led some of us to refer to those who were proficient at producing and coordinating the dissemination of this form as good GANmen. Grant managers were required to stay in touch with their grantees. They periodically visited their grantees' places of work or research sites to ensure that they were doing the work that they proposed. Sometimes this meant traveling a lot, making this portion of the job easier for single people and harder for those with young families. Unfortunately, and all too frequently despite grants being funded, rarely did the researchers produce final reports. Alternatively, they would publish their findings in a variety of venues, and once the manuscripts were accepted or shortly after publication, they would submit the articles and make a case for us to accept those as the final product.¹⁸ Up until recently, the agency placed more emphasis on funding than securing research findings. Then again, not all findings from reports that are turned in make their way into a publication. Results were selectively published by the institution. Although not all research is meant to produce important and publishable findings, there is considerable slippage between the reports NIJ receives and the information that makes its way into print. Nevertheless, if grantees want to avail themselves of additional funding, chances are they will produce some sort of report to NIJ. However, what it contains and when it is released is another matter.

Last, in any given week, innumerable scheduled and unscheduled staff meetings take place that administrators (some of whom lack familiarity with OJP policies) believe are necessary to keep the organization operating in a smooth fashion. Too often, the information presented was tangential or irrelevant to the majority of individuals who attended. With respect to the regularly scheduled meetings, everyone would usually be briefed on the latest developments that administrators believed were relevant to the division or work group. These gatherings were typically "dog and pony" shows where individuals, units, or divisions would discuss what they did as a form of self-promotion and information sharing. Frequently, each individual in a division would speak about the details of his or her job. Alternatively, a new policy change was introduced. The change, however, only affected a handful of people in attendance at the meeting. Meanwhile staff, with deadpan facial expressions, listened. Alternatively, they took their cues to laugh, following their supervisors. This ritual was supposed to help make others in the agency appreciate how difficult their job was or whom to contact when they had a particular problem. With respect to unscheduled meetings, staff were expected to drop everything and attend. Most of the meetings took place at the last minute, suggesting managerial disorganization or secretarial intransigence. During one particular week, we had 1- to 2-hour meetings every

day. Regardless of the timing, it was difficult to satisfactorily motivate staffers to attend. To ensure participation, managers would frequently walk the halls, encouraging their group to show up.

Unfortunately, committees or research initiatives would too frequently start but later get dropped for unexplained reasons, or serve to reinvent the wheel. For example, despite a well-funded and relatively respectable document entitled, "Strategic Planning Workshop: Developing a Police Research and Evaluation Agenda," which was the outcome of a meeting held in December 1994, I was asked, in the spring of 1997, to prepare a strategic planning committee to examine the same subject, and the results of that committee would be translated into an RFP.

Additional aspects of organizational culture bear mentioning. Most of the time, the proposals that staffers float are, for one reason or another, either rejected at a higher level or appropriated by senior officials as their own ideas. In the initial stages of developing a proposal or idea, the institute would get grant managers involved in a particular problem or opportunity, but after they successfully completed the initial work, as the time to submit the proposal to more senior administrators came closer, they would mysteriously not be invited to key meetings. Frequently, these sessions took place when the initiating staffers were out of the office, either before work, after they went home, and/or when they were out sick, travelling, or on vacation. When the staffers questioned why the meeting took place without their presence or knowledge, the occurrence and importance of the meeting would somehow be minimized. This practice would routinely frustrate staff and cause them to either float their ideas in public venues where a considerable number of people would hear the idea and its originator (e.g., staff meetings), go above their superior's head to float the concept, be obnoxiously self-referential about their ideas in meetings, or become cynical about the value of practices like the much touted concept of teamwork.

Nevertheless, some staff were successful in having their proposals for projects or research agendas adopted into research programs and getting the appropriate rewards. For example, a Violence Against Women Program, Crime Mapping Center, and Drug Use Forecasting (later changed to the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring Program) got favorable internal and external attention. These projects had appeal because they gave the agency a higher profile among a number of constituents inside the OJP and at the DOJ, Congress, and the White House. Staffers were either expected or encouraged to attend the meetings of these and other programs and to provide suggestions when fellow staffers or management were trying to work out the initial bugs. Later, all too often, those staffers who provided initial input would be excluded when the programs were up and running. Although much of this was embedded in turf battles, which included subject specializations and grants managed, this practice could most likely be explained by the pervasive careerism that existed among many of the senior managers.

Repeatedly, insiders would complain about the organizations' policies and practices, including the abundance of missed opportunities and the lack of appropriate controls, and suggest that "this is not the way to run the train." Perhaps the most persistent difficulty was the considerable amount of micromanagement of individuals, processes, and products. As previously mentioned, although staffers were tasked to write RFPs, rarely would the final document resemble the original drafts, as senior personnel would continuously shape the product. Alternatively, social science analysts would be assigned to manage expensive grants, although the really important decisions would be made by senior administrators who repeatedly extolled the virtues of teamwork, with grant managers frequently assuming a clerical role. Occasionally, staff would be party to these discussions or negotiations. More often, staffers would learn of these changes after the fact.

Staffers were routinely asked to brief their superiors about the projects they managed. It was not atypical for social science analysts to be managing more than 25 projects at the same time. Shortly after the briefing, staffers might be invited to a meeting during which the grant was discussed. They would then witness their superior briefing the boss on the project, based simply on the staffer's initial briefing. For many staffers, this seemed incredibly frustrating; they recognized that their supervisor was getting all the credit. In addition, it was not surprising that, during the course of an important meeting, staffers would learn that superiors had not read e-mails or memos that had been sent to them. Management would simply cram at the last minute or feign knowledge of the issues being discussed. Alternatively, memos were sent back to subordinates with disparaging comments. Too frequently, it became apparent that management had not understood or paid the appropriate amount of attention to previous oral or written communication. Thus, a considerable amount of energy was spent refreshing the bosses' memory. Often, a memo would be sent up the chain of command, but it would be stalled on someone's desk a week or two, or there would be no response to a memo. Too frequently, this gave staffers the impression that no one cared.

Finally, despite advances in the private sector and talk about future possibilities, the notions of flextime, flexplace, or telecommuting was rarely implemented. In addition, management was not particularly accommodating (i.e., flexible) with respect to employees' child care obligations.

OUTSIDERS: WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY DO

The majority of grants and contracts are given to university researchers, research corporations, and professional advocacy and research organizations. By and large, most grants go to well-known researchers who are familiar with the NIJ method, some of whom have spent time at NIJ as visiting fellows or members of peer review panels. In short, they know how to "walk the walk and talk the talk." It often appears as if the same individuals, universities, corpor-

ations, and professional organizations are continuously funded. As a result, never or rarely funded outside researchers become cynical and believe that the funds are "wired." Although there is talk about bringing in "new blood" (i.e., different researchers) as grantees, this is rarely done.

In addition, grants or contracts frequently go to corporations, many of them purportedly employee owned, that specialize in conducting large-scale evaluations, some of them long term. A small set of well-known research and consulting firms pejoratively labeled by NIJ staffers as "beltway bandits" or "body shops" consistently receive grants and contracts from NIJ. These include Abt Associates, Botec, Rand Corporation, Urban Institute, Vera Institute of Justice, and Westat. These organizations have the resources (i.e., budgets, staff, and experience) to write winning proposals.¹⁹ An alternative arrangement exists in which these firms assemble teams that work with respected academic researchers to conduct research or an evaluation.

Moreover, a number of research and advocacy organizations that primarily focus on one branch of the criminal justice system periodically receive NIJ funding. In the policing area, there is the community policing consortium, composed of the Police Executive Research Forum, Police Foundation, National Sheriffs Association, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, and the International Association of Chiefs of Police. When it comes to incarceration, the American Jails Association, American Correctional Association, and the National Center for Crime and Delinquency are big players. Finally, in the field of courts and sentencing, the American Bar Association, the American Prosecutors Research Institute, and the National Center for State Courts weigh in.

Most researchers or principal investigators who secure NIJ funding are capable individuals with well-established track records in securing external funding and conducting research. They say too much time passes between submission of grant applications and notification of results and/or between approval of funding and the time that they can actually draw down funds. This is mainly because so many approvals are out of their hands, either in the OJP machinery or in their university contracts office.

Many firms also provide technical assistance, and NIJ, like most government agencies, has special needs. These include putting on conferences, coordinating peer reviews of grant proposals and final products submitted by grantees, editing and producing research reports, and warehousing research reports. This sort of activity is provided by a variety of firms around the Washington beltway, including Aspen Systems Corporation, CSR, Cygnus Corporation, Cosmos Corporation, Institute for Law and Justice, and the Police Executive Research Forum. Among these organizations, employees often circulate from one employer to another. It is frequently argued that there is a symbiotic relationship between researchers and agencies. If not for the investigators, the agencies would be out of touch with what is going on in the field. By the same token, the acquisition of research funds has enabled the careers of a number of criminologists, who have been consistently supported by federal research agencies.

A variety of research types and methods are funded by the agency. The majority, however, can be regarded as evaluation research using quantitative methods. Qualitative research is rarely used unless it is combined with quantitative methods, and with the exception of violence against women, those subject matters identified with the work of critical criminologists are generally ignored. Clearly, the variety of programs that were funded through the Crime Bill needed to be evaluated. In fact, during the initial few months after the Crime Act was passed, there was a struggle between the COPS office and NIJ over who should take control of research funding. The large portfolio of research projects on policing was taken over by NIJ.

CONCLUSION

Like many government agencies, NIJ operates a revolving door through which people enter the agency and return to the private sector. Typically, individuals work for NIJ for a short period of time and enter or return to consulting companies, move on to other divisions inside the Department of Justice or other divisions of government, or enter or return to academia. Appropriately, what employees do, however, when they enter or return to the private sector is curtailed by strong ethics guidelines.

One way to get ahead in the institute is by brokering deals with other agencies and bringing money into NIJ. This was difficult at best, especially in light of the director's periodic warning that he disliked "freelancing" (i.e., staffers who, on their own, try to initiate and negotiate deals with other arms of government). Nevertheless, some employees were either delegated or given administrative approval to negotiate cooperative agreements with the Drug Enforcement Agency, or with NIDA, or ONDCP, and this was then perceived to be a positive contribution to the organization. This practice was functional. It gave senior administrators a chance to enhance and expand their network with the funds that are administered by NIJ.

Needless to say, for actual or aspiring researchers, working at NIJ can be a frustrating experience, and this sort of difficulty leads many people to leave. If my experience is illustrative and instructive, working at NIJ is recommended for people who are in the early stages of their research career, have not worked for the government, or may want a subsequent career in a research consulting-type environment.

If you are currently finishing your doctorate in criminology, criminal justice (or a related field) or have had difficulty securing a teaching job at a reasonably respectable institution, then NIJ may be an acceptable temporary home. Needless to say, living in Washington is a lifestyle decision. If you like the fast pace of a big city, then working at NIJ may also be appropriate. After working for government, you will notice a certain ethos shared by bureaucrats, much of which was described by Weber, but for the full effect, it must be experienced.

Although working at NIJ may prepare you for a job in research consulting, if my job interviews with research consulting companies were indicative, it appeared that these organizations valued proposal writing and project management more than the ability to conduct the actual research and have it published in peer-reviewed venues. At research corporations, a freelancer or subcontractor could be temporarily hired to do limited and specific tasks if someone lacked research experience. In addition, there was a perception among NIJ staffers that the longer you stayed at NIJ, the harder it would be for you to get a job with a research consulting firm or in an academic environment. It was argued that the longer you worked for the agency, the greater the possibility that people would believe that you had some input in denying them funding.

There should be no pretense about the value of the work you do at NIJ. The need to deal with supervisors—many of whom may be self-interested, abrasive, disorganized, and not particularly well versed in the deeper issues of criminology and criminal justice—should be acknowledged.

In many respects, my experience confirmed what many outsiders had suspected all along about NIJ. The pull of the policy audience, as some academics have described it, is a formidable force that is difficult to control, not only in criminological and criminal justice research (Leo, 1996) but in teaching about these subjects as well (Tunnell, 1998). Because most of the critical decisions about research direction and funding were made either at higher levels of the organization or outside of NIJ (i.e., by the assistant attorney general, attorney general, White House, or Congress), my cohorts and I had minimal impact on the research agenda of NIJ.

Critics and astute observers of the agency have suggested that NIJ be disbanded and/or moved outside of the DOJ (Wilson, 1997, pp. 7-8), perhaps to the NIH. This would minimize the political nature of the research and increase the rigor of the selection procedures for grants and contracts. Although tempting at first glance, this move might minimize our ability to evaluate criminal justice policies and practices.

Regardless, working for NIJ allowed me the opportunity to find out how one agency of the federal government conducts—or, more realistically, sponsors—policy relevant research. Because academic institutions are increasingly sensitive to finances, securing grants and contracts is almost vital to the survival of untenured faculty members. My NIJ experience has sensitized me to the process by which government funding can take place. In essence, I have learned to “walk the walk and talk the talk.” I hope this experience will sharpen my skills in securing grants from a variety of government and nongovernmental agencies.

NOTES

1. In Canada, the Police and Security Branch used to perform this function as part of the Federal Solicitor General's office. In Great Britain, this function is performed by the Home Office.

2. For a recent and excellent book on the use of ethnography in criminology/criminal justice, see, for example, Ferrell and Hamm (1998).

3. For an evaluation of the implementation of this act and the agency it created (the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration [LEAA]), see, for example, White and Krislov (1977) and Feeley and Sarat (1980).

4. For a review of the history of the Crime bill, see, for example, Houston and Parsons (1998, chapter 4). For an analysis of Clinton's crime policies, which resulted in the Crime Bill, see, for example, Currie (1994), Kramer and Michalowski (1995), and Glass (1997).

5. As expected, I encountered a sufficient amount of derision from my critical criminology colleagues in connection with my decision to work for NIJ.

6. This included, at the time, two edited books, a handful of book contracts, 10 journal articles, about an equal number of chapters in academic books, and a large number of conference presentations.

7. In other words, a minor distraction.

8. For a discussion of the difference between the grant and contract process, see, for example, Bernstein and Freeman (1975, pp. 8-14). In general, a grant is like a gift. Researchers propose a course of research and, on termination, present their findings to the granting agency. A contract, on the other hand, is an agreement to perform a limited service for the agency (e.g., coordinate reviews, put on a conference, publish a report, etc.). The need to hire more individuals occurred, in part, because some of the people who worked for the ORE transferred out to work for the newly established Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, which was created as part of the Crime Bill.

9. I use the terms *social science analyst* and *grant manager* interchangeably throughout this article.

10. Although some staff conducted research, this was often accomplished after hours, on the weekends, or covertly.

11. Much of this got bogged down in the outlining of procedures on how the proposals would be entertained and approved and a challenge by staff that their first amendment rights were being abridged.

12. NIJ's mission is presented to the public through a variety of channels. One of the more important documents is its annual Research Prospectus (e.g., Building Knowledge About Crime and Justice: Research Prospectus 1998).

13. Other major branches of the DOJ include the Federal Bureau of Prisons, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Border Patrol, Marshall's Service, Drug Enforcement Administration, and so on.

14. Other offices included assistant attorney general, corrections, drug courts, comptroller, general counsel, congressional and public affairs, civil rights, and personnel.

15. The utility of evaluation studies has been questioned by many (e.g., Bernstein & Freeman, 1975; Wholey, Scanlon, Duffy, Fukumoto, & Vogt, 1970).

16. The use of the term *program manager* appeared voluntary and was intended to imply that the portfolio that the social science analyst held had some overarching theme, such as violence against women, or firearms, and so on.

17. Perhaps this is why, in general, reviewers for NIJ are paid and those for many other research agencies (e.g., NIH, NSF) are not. Payment may be used to release the agency from being held accountable to the reviewer for the agency's recommendations to fund or not fund the reviewed project.

18. Research use is another important issue, particularly understanding when and how final reports are catalogued and accessed. This subject, however, is beyond the scope of this article.

19. According to Bernstein and Freeman (1975), "evaluation research has become an unstudied industry with a vast consortium of large and small profit-making corporations, nonprofit-making groups, university research centers, and independent entrepreneurs—both in and out of academic environment—engaged in assessing social-action programs" (p. xi).

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