

This paper briefly describes Utah's approach to creating a new management tool to maximize the money spent on criminal justice programs.



Overview of Methodology

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As good consumers we seek “value”, that perfect balance between cost and quality that ensures that we are getting the most for our money. But in a marketplace that has vastly different price points and levels of quality, that value equation becomes complex. A cost benefit model helps bring both cost and quality into focus and provides valuable information to help make choices in a complex market. But how do you measure cost and quality in a fair way to ensure that the model can be safely used by consumers?

In our model, costs were calculated using budgetary information from our state criminal justice agencies (Courts, Corrections, Public Safety, Juvenile Justice Services and the Attorney General's Office) over a six year period (2005-2010). This information was combined with similar data from both county and municipal budgets gleaned from the files of the State Auditor's Office. Together this information included over 2000 separate data points. The budget information was then matched with crime data over the same period. The result was a statistical model that helps predict the cost to taxpayers for the investigation, arrest, prosecution, and incarceration of murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault, and the property crimes of burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft. Further details of this process can be found in ***“Utah Cost of Crime 2012: Introduction to an Econometric Cost-Benefit Approach”***.

To better understand “quality” in our value equation, we began by prioritizing program areas of interest. Using a systematic review process, we focused on finding and analyzing program evaluations in our prioritized areas to assess program effectiveness (or “quality”). This task began with an exhaustive search of the literature from which thousands of research papers and program evaluations were examined. This list was further honed to determine if each study met our strict inclusion criteria, and then each evaluation was read and assessed to determine its methodological rigor. If it was considered acceptable, it was combined with other evaluations in a given program area to create a quality index called an “effect size” using a process called meta-analysis. Further details of this process can be found in ***“Utah Cost of Crime 2012: Methods for Reviewing Program Effectiveness”***.

If you have any questions about these reports, or any of the brief reports within the program categories on the Utah Cost of Crime 2012 page, please contact Dr. Ben Peterson, Director of Research & Data at CCJJ, at benpeterson@utah.gov.