



REPORT HIGHLIGHTS PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Commission should develop strategic approach to better use its research center

Our Conclusion

The Arizona Criminal Justice Commission (Commission) was established in 1982 to carry out various coordinating, monitoring, and reporting functions regarding the administration and management of criminal justice programs in Arizona. We found that the Commission could better use the capabilities of its Statistical Analysis Center (research center) to fulfill its mission to “sustain and enhance the coordination, cohesiveness, productivity, and effectiveness of Arizona’s criminal justice system” by providing a strategic approach for the research center, enhancing the research center’s work on current reports, and expanding its research activities. Additionally, the Commission has established effective grant-awarding and monitoring processes that closely align with state and federal requirements and incorporate recommended practices. Although the Commission followed these processes for the grants we reviewed, it should formalize the coordination of its victim assistance grants with the Arizona Department of Public Safety (DPS) and other victim assistance stakeholders.

Arizona statute establishes the Commission’s research center to prepare research, analyses, studies, reports, and publications of crime and criminal justice statistics. The research center produces five statutorily required reports regarding criminal justice system activity in the State. These include the *Arizona Crime Trends: A System Review* report, which provides state-level information on the crime rate, number of court case filings, and the number of individuals incarcerated or on probation; and the *Arizona Youth Survey*, which is designed to measure both attitudes and the actual prevalence and frequency of youth substance abuse. The Commission also uses the research center to facilitate research among criminal justice agencies and support the Commission’s grant programs. All but two states have a similar statistical analysis center.

Commission can improve its use of the research center to help fulfill its mission—

The Commission is in a unique position to leverage the data and information produced by its research center to effect positive change in the State, but we identified gaps in three areas of the research center’s work:

- **Limited evaluation and analyses**—Similar to a finding from our 1996 performance audit, commission reports produced by the research center contain limited evaluation and analyses of Arizona’s criminal justice system. Specifically, the prior audit found that the Commission’s lack of analyses and evaluation of the criminal justice system hindered its ability to provide meaningful recommendations and fulfill its overall mission. Although the research center’s current reports contain some evaluation and analyses, such as changes in criminal activity over time, and occasionally include recommendations, these reports do not provide any analyses or evaluation of the effectiveness of the criminal justice system as a whole or address emerging trends or issues in the criminal justice system. In contrast, statistical analysis centers in other states investigate emerging criminal justice issues and make recommendations to address system-wide needs.
- **Required recommendations missing**—The Commission has not ensured that its research center’s crime trends report contains statutorily required recommendations to improve the criminal justice system. Commission staff reported that the Commission recommends changes to the criminal justice system through other activities, such as regular stakeholder meetings that result in proposed legislative changes to the criminal code. However, the Commission’s crime trends reports since at least April 2001 have not included specific recommendations to improve the criminal justice system as directed by statute.
- **Information could be better used to address state-wide issues**—Similar to the work that the research center performs for its three grant programs, the Commission can improve the use of its research center’s primary work to directly address state-wide criminal justice issues. For example, the research center presented information at only three of the ten commission meetings held in 2014 and 2015 and the information did not result in action by commission members. Additionally, commission members we interviewed indicated they use the research center’s information as it pertains to their own jurisdictions, but not as a group to propose and effect state-wide



2016

changes to the criminal justice system. We also received some feedback that the Commission could make better use of its position to address state-wide criminal justice issues.

Commission should develop strategic approach for research center—The Commission should develop a strategic approach for overseeing its research center to ensure that its work helps the Commission fulfill its mission. Specifically, the Commission should establish a committee to develop research priorities and/or a strategy for the research center similar to the committees it has established for its grant program areas. In addition, the Commission should receive regular updates on the research center's progress in accomplishing the approved strategy and use the information from the research center, including report recommendations, to more fully implement its mission to enhance Arizona's criminal justice system. Finally, the Commission should resolve issues with its current reports and assess the extent to which the research center can expand its work to include assessments of emerging trends in the criminal justice system.

Recommendations

The Commission should:

- Establish a committee to develop research priorities and/or a strategy for the research center;
- Receive regular updates on the research center's progress;
- Use the information from the research center, including report recommendations, to more fully implement its mission;
- Resolve issues with its current reports; and
- Assess the extent to which the research center can expand its work to include assessments of emerging trends in the criminal justice system.

Commission has established effective grant-awarding and monitoring processes, but should formalize coordination efforts in one area

Commission has effective grant-awarding and monitoring processes—The Commission has established and followed policies and procedures for awarding and monitoring grants that closely align with state and federal requirements and incorporate recommended practices. The Commission's policies and procedures also include helpful grant administration practices recommended by other entities, including the U.S. Department of Justice. We reviewed a random sample of nine grants that the Commission awarded during grant year 2014 and found that the Commission followed the key application review, awarding, and monitoring policies and procedures we selected for review.

Commission should formalize its coordination efforts for the victim assistance grant program—The Commission administers a state-funded victim assistance grant program that has the same purpose as a federally funded grant program that the DPS administers. There is potential for overlap between the Commission's and DPS' grant programs because public and private organizations in Arizona may receive victim assistance grants from both programs. According to commission management, it works with the DPS and other victim assistance stakeholders to coordinate victim assistance grant monies in the State. However, this coordination effort has not been formalized in a written process.

Recommendation

The Commission should develop a formal written process to annually review with the DPS, and other victim assistance stakeholders as appropriate, the estimated amount of available state and federal victim assistance monies and develop coordinated funding priorities.