

# From Knowledge to Action: Rethinking Public Criminology for Real-World Impact

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# What is “Public Criminology”?

- Dissemination of research to broader audiences
  - Criminal justice practitioners, public officials, journalists, and the general public
- Aligned with goals of this conference
  - to “...bring together policymakers, academics, and stakeholders to showcase policy-relevant research with a direct bearing on effective CJ administration and crime prevention”
- Essential in this period of rising crime and calls for more punitive measures

# Answering Seven Essential Questions

What works?

Why does it work?

How does it work?

What more do we need to know?

How do we go about learning it?

What strategies can help drive changes in practice?

What can we do to promote public criminology?

# How do we know what works?

- Are we spending too much time seeking “effective” programs?
  - Brand name programs
  - “What works” clearinghouses
- Tackling the classic evaluator’s dilemma
  - How do we know which activities in a program are making a difference?
  - Or does the desired impact rely on a combination of a subset of those measures?
  - If so, which ones?
- Emphasizing components analysis



# Answering the “why” question

*Core components are the parts, features, attributes, or characteristics of a program that a range of research techniques show influence its success when implemented effectively. These core components can serve as the unit of analysis that researchers use to determine “what works,” and they become the areas practitioners and policymakers seek to replicate within and across a range of related programs and systems in order to improve outcomes.*

– US Department of Health & Human Services

# But *how* does it work?

- Randomized Controlled Trials – the “Gold Standard” of evaluation methodology
- Peter Rossi’s Metallic Laws of Evaluation
  - The “iron law” - larger-scale interventions are more likely to yield null findings
  - The “stainless law” - the more rigorous evaluations are the less likely to detect effects
  - The “brass law” - programs focusing on individual change are most likely to have zero net impact



# Rethinking the Metallic Hierarchy

	High Rigor	Low Rigor
High fidelity	<p>Platinum</p> 	<p>Gold</p> 
Low fidelity	<p>Silver</p> 	<p>Scrap Metal</p> 

# Answering the “How Works” Question: The Titanium Law of Evaluation



*The less deliberate the implementation of a social program is, the more likely its net impact will be zero.*



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# What happens when we fail to consider fidelity and local context?

- Compromises ability to interpret research findings accurately
- Prevents mid-course corrections that could enhance program outcomes
- May misattribute program failure to flaws in design or theory, rather than implementation shortcomings
- May explain rarity of replication success

# Ex.: Work Release Program

- Places incarcerated individuals in jobs with guaranteed post-release employment
- Logistical challenges may hinder participant attendance
  - Lockdowns
  - Inadequate transport
- Gaining employer participation
- Changes in labor agreement
- Differences in job availability
  - agricultural work release program in one setting versus manufacturing in another



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# What makes for successful interventions?

- Strategies are localized
- Focused on a thorough problem analysis
- Engages with all relevant stakeholders
- Responses address underlying causes of the problem under study
- In other words, action research, or problem solving
  - Use problem analysis as baseline
  - Allow for “feedback loops” and mid-course corrections



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# Five Key Research Process Priorities

1. Engage stakeholders authentically (aka “inclusive research”)
2. Apply racial equity lens
3. Employ mixed methods
4. Partner across disciplines
5. Emphasize translation



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# From Evidence to Action

- Credible messengers
- The power of the nudge
  - Build evidence into everyday practices
  - Embed EBPs into policies, software, pre-existing performance metrics
- Internal capacity and cultural readiness
- Celebrating crusaders





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# Promoting Public Criminology

- Translate better
- Connect with “end users”
- Engage with the media
- Incentivize public criminology
  - Reward public engagement
  - Build internal capacity
- Focus on impact
- Prevent the swing of the pendulum



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**THANK YOU**



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