

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/the-value-of-crime-analysts>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Would you explain the origins of the new paper, [*Putting a Value on Crime Analysts: Considerations for Law Enforcement Executives*](#)? What was LEFG's role in this? What were the questions or problems you were hearing?

LEFG was conceived almost three years ago by BJA, and they brought together police chiefs, sheriffs, researchers, and administrators. The purpose of this group is to look at big-picture issues within law enforcement: what the future holds, what trends they think will happen, and what can and should we start doing about those trends.

About a year ago, we started to talk about crime analysis and its importance. Some of the smaller departments started to ask, What is the value of crime analysis and how do we defend the requests we want to make for these civilian positions? In the medium and large departments, they were facing budget cuts. Their questions were about, How do we keep crime analysts, justify them, make sure people understand what they do and how do we work with the city budget people who don't understand crime analysis and its value? The chiefs and administrators were saying, Why don't we have something on cost-benefit analysis (CBA)? We know what the costs and the benefits are. Will that help us justify the positions and ask for more analysts? Law enforcement is very concerned about having the right type of analysts, keeping civilians, and not having these positions cut.

In Los Angeles, where I do a lot of work, five years ago they had 137 civilian crime-analyst positions. Over the last few years the city has cut or eliminated about 100 of those positions; those analysts have been replaced by clerks and police officers. Now the Los Angeles Police Department has 70 percent fewer trained civilian crime analysts to work on CompStat and look at patterns of crime in its patrol divisions and across the city. (I'm personally involved in that area.) The leaders in the city—the mayor, city council, and budget people—don't realize what the analysts are doing and don't appreciate their value.

That's how the request for this paper evolved. Because the director of BJA, [Denise O'Donnell](#), and the deputy director, [Kristen Mahoney](#), are strongly pursuing this idea of having analytics and analysis more within policing, it was a timely discussion that we had last year.

How do you hope the information in this paper will get used? And what, if anything, do you want to draw people's attention to?

The paper's main points are pertinent both to CBA and crime analysis overall. You raise three questions about the value of crime analysts. First: What is the purpose? Why do you have crime analysts and what do you use them for? In some cases analysts aren't used for analytic purposes, and that drives me crazy. Second: The paper focuses people on the costs associated with crime analysis. We don't think about the costs. It's important for police to home in on that and on the added value that crime analysts provide for them. And third, are there feasible alternatives to having a crime analyst on staff? That starts to open doors: Do we use contractors; do we use researchers and still get what we need, but not necessarily have a staffer?

If people focus on those three areas, it will get them thinking about what crime analysts do, what it costs, and what other ways there are to do the work. This type of analysis is extremely important now. That's where we're headed in law enforcement: using data and using analytics to drive decision making. I would love to see people use this paper to guide them in that thinking.

What needs to happen in the field to make economic analysis more useful to law enforcement?

Just the language of economic analysis needs to be pressed more. I think cops and executives don't think about the cost of crime. They don't ask themselves, What am I doing when I reduce crime? How can I translate what we do into [cost savings](#)? They're reducing victimization, but they're also reducing the costs associated with violent crime and property crime. I know CBKB did another recent publication on advancing [the quality of CBA in justice programs](#). I think both documents should go to police chiefs so they can start taking a look at costs and benefits.

*The Police Foundation's [Introductory Guide to Crime Analysis and Mapping](#) defines crime analysis as the qualitative and quantitative study of crime and law enforcement information in combination with socio-demographic and spatial factors to apprehend criminals, prevent crime, reduce disorder, and evaluate organizational procedures.

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