

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/cost-benefit-analysis-building-the-will-and-the-way>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

The title of [a new publication](#) from [Vera's Cost-Benefit Knowledge Bank for Criminal Justice \(CBKB\)](#) is admittedly a mouthful: Building Cost-Benefit Analysis Capacity in Criminal Justice: Notes from a Roundtable Discussion. It also includes a dreaded word: capacity. Capacity is described as a vague, quasi-occult term in its entry in the Communications Networks [Jargon Finder](#), and capacity-building sits at the top of an [unofficial nonprofit jargon top 10 list](#).

So what are we talking about when we talk about capacity, particularly in the context of cost-benefit analysis in criminal justice? Why did CBKB hold [a roundtable discussion](#) on it, and why does the CBKB staff provide [targeted technical assistance](#) to help jurisdictions build it?

The process of using information from cost-benefit studies consistently to make better-informed decisions doesn't happen overnight. There may be a way, but not the will; CBAs may yield compelling and helpful insights, but only if policymakers and decision makers are willing and able to make use of such information. Or the opposite may be true: there may be a high demand for cost-benefit studies on particular policy issues, but high-quality or relevant CBAs don't exist, which is often the case for criminal and juvenile justice questions.

By capacity, we mean the ability to conduct good cost-benefit studies and to demand CBA-related information for planning and policymaking. How a jurisdiction and the criminal justice field generally can reach this level of skill and sustained interest in CBA was the focus of the roundtable.

The resulting publication captures only a sliver of what the discussion covered but it contains concrete suggestions about the kind of organizations that can build and house CBA expertise; the characteristics of staff who can do this work and how to find them; and multiple ways to integrate CBA information into decision-making processes.

Will you get overnight results if you follow these recommendations and advice? Unfortunately, no. But the information from the roundtable can set you and your jurisdiction on a clearer path to establishing both the will and the way to using CBA in criminal justice.

This post also appears on the [blog](#) of the Cost-Benefit Knowledge Bank for Criminal Justice, which is a project of the Vera Institute of Justice.

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