

# **Mercyhurst College Civic Institute**



## **Erie County Criminal Justice Advisory Board (ECCJAB) Process Evaluation**

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

Isn't it logical? If you work together, you should end up with something better than if you work apart?

W. Edwards Deming, the “Father” of Total Quality Management

Over the last few centuries society has developed many different methods for managing and controlling its governmental bodies. Ultimately, this has led to the development of governing boards. These boards can be found in a myriad of settings from education to criminal justice, and from profit to non-profit. Over 13 years ago Houle (as cited in Carver, 1997, p. 88) stated that there are approximately 4.5 million boards in the United States. John Carver, a prolific author and expert on non-profit boards adds, "It is virtually impossible to escape contact with boards. We are either on boards, work for them, or are affected by their decisions" (1997, p. 1). Outside governmental concerns, the business community discovered the utility of partnerships long ago (National Institute of Corrections, 2001). Visionary companies, as well as government, frequently reject the autocratic approach in favor of collaborative team building.

Clearly, unless the monarch system of governance suddenly rises from the ashes, advisory boards are here to stay. From the United Nations to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, we are wedded to collaborative decision-making. What is not so certain is how this somewhat cantankerous ally can be properly harnessed. George Sexton (2000), president of Criminal Justice Associates, a consulting organization that frequently offers technical assistance to advisory boards, described collaboration as “dark and lonely work” (personal communication, 9/13/02). Nonetheless, most experts agree that, although difficult, collaborative decision-making is still very worthwhile. According to Glotzbach (2002), “like politics, institutional governance is above all the art of the possible” (p. 9).

The Criminal Justice Advisory Board in Erie County, Pennsylvania, has existed for over 10 years in various configurations from an intermediate punishment board to the present structure that deals with a multitude of crime related issues. Over this decade, the Erie County criminal justice system has used the services of the Advisory Board to review initiatives and offer recommendations for improvement. Presently, the Board operates under a format allowing for a monthly meeting attended by a core group of criminal justice professionals, called the Planning Committee, and also has a larger representative group that assembles twice per year.

In late 1999, Erie County obtained a state grant to assist in the operation of this board and contracted for technical assistance with a local educational consulting agency: the Mercyhurst College Civic Institute. To their credit, the present Board recently decided to evaluate their performance. This step was taken to enhance the services to the citizens of Erie County and to improve the overall functioning of the Board. This report is an

attempt to assist the Board with this assessment, and we are grateful for the opportunity to serve the criminal justice system in this capacity.

***2003 ERIE COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE ADVISORY BOARD***

Thomas Aaron	District Court Administrator*
Tod Allen	Victim Witness
Hon. Fred Anthony	Erie County Judge
Charles Barber	Erie County Prison Warden*
Peter Benekos	Advisory Board Chair*
Bob Blakely	Erie County Juvenile Probation*
Gerald Blanks	GECAC
Charles Bowers	Chief, Erie Police Department
Hon. John Bozza	Erie County Judge
Ann Bloxdorf	Erie County Director of Administration*
Keith Breter	Court IT Representative*
Erby Conley	Commander, PSP Troop E
Hon. Shad Connelly	Erie County Judge
Hon. William Cunningham	Erie County President Judge*
Hon. Ernest DiSantis	Erie County Judge
Shirley Dinger	PA Prison Society
Larry Dombrowski	Erie County District Attorney's Office*
Hon. Stephanie Domitrovich	Erie County Judge
Hon. Michael Dunlavey	Erie County Judge
Joe Giles	County Council Member*
Shari Gross	Case Management*
Hon. Elizabeth Kelly	Erie County Judge
Christine Konzal	Erie County Public Defender*
Miriam Vos	PA Prison Society
Mary Kwiatkowski	Erie County MH/MR Offices*
Robert Lewis	Erie County Adult Probation*
Patricia Lightener	PA Prison Society
Sr. Rosanne Lindal	PA Prison Society
Carol Loll	Erie County Council*
Peggy Machinski	PA Prison Society
Sue Mack	District Justice
Namon McWilliams	Office of Drug & Alcohol Abuse*
Jim Meko	Gannon University*
Charles Mock	Pastor, Minority Community Rep.
Rick Schenker	Erie County Executive*
Sr. Stephanie Schmidt	House of Healing
Rick Seaman	Erie County Sheriff's Office
Rick Seus	Erie County Prison
Jeff Shaw	Erie County Adult Probation*
Marlene Smith	Erie County Adult Probation*
William Shorten	Chief, Millcreek Police Department
Hon. John Trucilla	Erie County Judge
James Veshecco	Erie County Prison
Shirley Vollentine	Neighborhood Watch Group
Joseph Weindorf	Public Safety Director

**\*Represents Member of the Planning Committee**

## ***METHOD OF EVALUATION***

### Status of the Board

At the meeting on December 4, 2002, the Planning Committee of the Erie County Criminal Justice Advisory Board (ECCJAB) approved the completion of a process assessment of the ECCJAB. The focus of this study is to assess the effectiveness of the ECCJAB in achieving its established goals and objectives. This evaluation is the first effort to measure the success of the board's services, specifically reviewing criminal justice initiatives and offering recommendations for improvement. This evaluation is necessary in order to insure that a positive, collaborative problem solving model is used for criminal justice decisions in Erie County.

### National Data

As part of this study, The Civic Institute contacted 25 criminal justice boards within the United States to gather their views on collaborative decision making. One question was directed at whether the board in question had conducted an evaluation. Surprisingly, out of fourteen responses only two, (14%) acknowledged that an evaluation had been completed. Therefore, the ECCJAB is to be congratulated concerning their interest and commitment to evaluate their activities and effectiveness.

### Guidelines for the Erie County Criminal Justice Advisory Boards

### Criteria for Evaluation

In order to complete the study, it was necessary to select criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of the board. The Planning Committee decided to automatically include the seven original criteria taken from the board's "Purpose of the Erie County Criminal Justice Advisory Board" as stated in County Council Resolution 29, adopted July 16, 1994, in the survey instrument. After this was completed the Planning Committee reviewed numerous criteria and selected twenty-two items including an "additional comments" section. The entire evaluation survey was used to gauge the ECCJAB's overall effectiveness as an advisory board.

### Analysis

After being adopted by the planning committee, the survey was sent to the entire ECCJAB membership. Following the survey administration, staff from the Mercyhurst Civic Institute completed a gap analysis. This analysis determined any gaps that exist between the criteria established for effectiveness and the results from the evaluation tool. Any inconsistencies were used to recommend changes and identify areas of improvement. The data was compiled and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

Survey Administration

The staff from the Mercyhurst Civic Institute sent surveys to the entire ECCJAB, therefore, a total of forty-five were mailed. The consultants received twenty surveys back for analysis, which gives the study a return rate of 44%.

***EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR EFFECTIVENESS:                      MEAN RESPONSE***

**29 Statements Were Sent to the ECCJAB (Figure 1):**

After all the surveys were compiled, the mean response to each statement was calculated. Out of the 29 statements, the most frequent answer is three, 65% of the responses Neither Agree or Disagree. The next most frequent answer is four, Somewhat Disagree (21%) followed by two, Somewhat Agree (14%). The mean analysis shows that the extreme answers were not among the average for any of the statements.

The original seven criteria for effectiveness as set by the County Council are marked by shading. The average respondent agreed that three out of the seven criteria were true of the board. The average respondent disagreed with just one of the seven original criteria being true of the board.

Agreement with each statement signifies that the respondent feels the statement is true for the Erie board. Gaps are noted when the majority of the respondents disagreed with the specific evaluation criteria.

	<b>Figure 1: STATEMENT</b>	<b>Mean</b>
1	The ECCJAB builds a constituency for criminal justice.	2
2	The ECCJAB keeps criminal justice administrators in touch with private citizens and their concerns regarding the criminal justice system.	3
3	The ECCJAB provides a forum in which public officials and private citizens discuss priorities, concerns and opportunities, working together to develop strategies for change and system improvement.	3
4	The ECCJAB provides a forum in which board members with differing views can gain an appreciation for other perspectives and can reach common ground.	2
5	The ECCJAB gives criminal justice agencies a credible voice to explain programs, services issues and incidents to those outside the criminal justice system.	3
6	The ECCJAB gives members of the public a sense of ownership and commitment to criminal justice programs in Erie County.	4
7	The ECCJAB provides updates on the Erie County Intermediate Punishment Program, its effect on county correctional resources and develops modification options as necessary.	2
8	The ECCJAB deals with a complete local justice system. (All the local programs and services for offenders fall within the planning jurisdiction.)	3
9	The ECCJAB have sufficient authority to obtain necessary data and to develop plans for local justice system.	3
10	The ECCJAB receives adequate financial and other support from the local government.	4
11	The ECCJAB emphasizes policy and program level planning.	3
12	The ECCJAB has a clear idea of the planning goals and strategies.	3
13	Planning tasks are clearly delineated among members of the ECCJAB.	3
14	The ECCJAB undertakes a wide variety of activities rather than allocating grant funds.	3
15	The ECCJAB is broadly representative of all levels of government.	2
16	The ECCJAB has developed ground rules on how we will function and how board members will behave.	3
17	The goals of the ECCJAB are clear and manageable.	3
18	The Board member's roles are clear.	3
19	The mission and vision of the ECCJAB are clearly stated and adhered to by the board members.	3
20	Neutrality, credibility, and stability characterize the ECCJAB.	3
21	Board members deal with conflict openly and honestly in an effort to resolve it.	4
22	The ECCJAB has a collaborative climate; members enjoy trust, honesty, openness, consistency, respect & dignity.	3
23	Communication, ideas and information flow freely among Board members.	3
24	Board meetings are useful and productive.	3
25	The ECCJAB's external relationships are good.	4
26	The ECCJAB is oriented towards "ends management"; board members are focused on the big picture issues.	3
27	Being on the ECCJAB helps me deal with issues concerning my department/area that I represent.	3
28	The efforts of the ECCJAB are effective and recognized by the public.	4
29	Public officials and private citizens are familiar with the duties, responsibilities and functions of the ECCJAB.	4

1=Completely Agree, 2=Somewhat Agree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Somewhat Disagree, 5=Completely Disagree, 6=Not enough information to answer

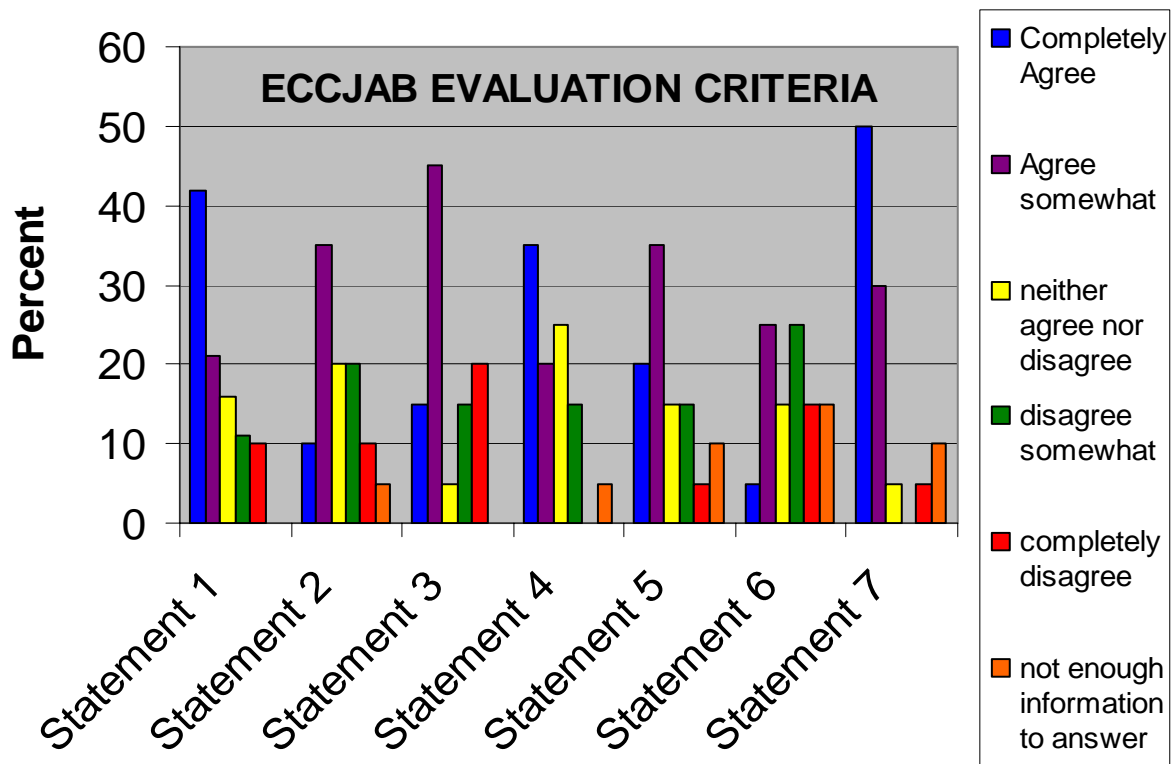
**EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR EFFECTIVENESS: FREQUENCIES**

**A. Original Seven Criteria (As set by the County Council in 1994)**

- #1 The ECCJAB builds a constituency for criminal justice.
- #2 The ECCJAB keeps criminal Justice administrators in touch with private citizens and their concerns regarding the criminal justice system.
- #3 The ECCJAB provides a forum in which public officials and private citizens discuss priorities, concerns and opportunities, working together to develop strategies for change and system improvement.
- #4 The ECCJAB provides a forum in which board members with differing views can gain an appreciation for other perspectives and can reach common ground.
- #5 The ECCJAB gives criminal justice agencies a credible voice to explain programs, services, issues and incidents to those outside the criminal justice system.
- #6 The ECCJAB gives members of the public a sense of ownership and commitment to criminal justice programs in Erie County.
- #7 The ECCJAB provides updates on the Erie County Intermediate Punishment Program, its effect on county correctional resources and develops modification options as necessary.

In 1994, these seven statements were used to implement the Erie County Criminal Justice Advisory Board. Therefore, these are criteria specific to the ECCJAB. The board’s response to these statements is shown in **Figure 2**.

**Figure 2**





**#1 Gap Analysis**

The most obvious inconsistency between the respondent’s answers and the set criteria is within statement 6. Only 30% of the respondents agreed with the statement, “The ECCJAB gives members of the public a sense of ownership and commitment to the criminal justice programs in Erie County.” There were three statements (2, 3 & 5) where the majority of the respondents “neither agreed nor disagreed.” These data are significant because three out of the seven original criteria proved to be not effective to the majority of the board. However the majority of the board agreed with statements 1, 4 & 7. 63% of the board agreed that, “The ECCJAB builds a constituency for criminal justice.” And 55% agreed that, “The ECCJAB provides a forum in which board members with differing views can gain an appreciation for other perspectives and can reach common ground.” It can be inferred from the data that one part of the ECCJAB’s success is the creation of an open forum for discussion and debate among criminal justice professionals. An overwhelming majority (80%) agreed that, “The ECCJAB provides updates on the Erie County Intermediate Punishment Program, its effect on county correctional resources and develops modification options as necessary.” Therefore, another successful aspect of the board is the platform it provides for criminal justice professionals to discuss programs.

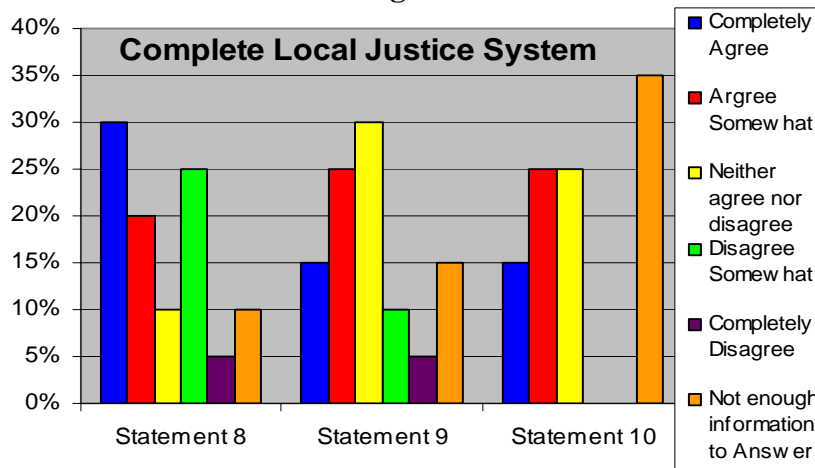
***FREQUENCIES Continued:***

**B. Complete Local Justice System-Authority & Support**

This group of statements addressed the board’s span of authority and access to resources (**Figure 3**). The board’s ideal position in the Erie County Justice System is the main criteria for evaluation in this group of statements.

- #8 The ECCJAB deals with a complete local justice system. (All the local programs and services for offenders fall with the planning jurisdiction.)
- #9 The ECCJAB has sufficient authority to obtain necessary data and to develop plans for the local justice system.
- #10 The ECCJAB receives adequate financial and other support from the local government.

**Figure 3**



**#2 Gap Analysis**

Although 50% of the respondents agreed that, (#8) “The ECCJAB deals with a complete local justice system (All local programs and services for offenders fall within the planning jurisdiction),” 10% answered that they did not have enough information to answer. A similar pattern emerges from the two other statements. There was not an overwhelming majority of respondents who disagreed with these statements. However, there were respondents that could not answer them. 15% of the respondents felt that they did not have enough information to answer that, (#9) “The ECCJAB has sufficient authority to obtain necessary data and to develop plans for local justice system.” Also, 35% did not have enough information to answer, (#10) “The ECCJAB receives adequate financial and other support from the local government.” Thus, a conclusion can be draw from the data that many of the board members are not sure of the board’s place among local government institutions. These board members are most likely not on the planning committee, which meets monthly.

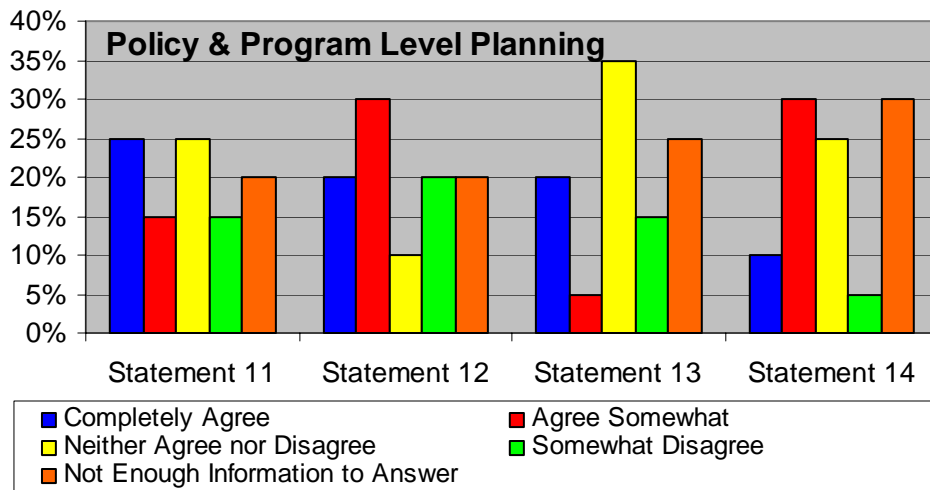
**FREQUENCIES Continued:**

**C. Planning Criteria of ECCJAB**

The next group of statements focuses on the planning component of the ECCJAB.

- #11 The ECCJAB emphasizes policy and program level planning.
- #12 The ECCJAB has a clear idea of the planning goals and strategies.
- #13 Planning tasks are clearly delineated among members of the ECCJAB.
- #14 The ECCJAB undertakes a wide variety of activities rather than allocating grant funds.

**Figure 4**



**#3 Gap Analysis**

The basic functions of the board are measured for effectiveness (**Figure 4**). Again, the trend among the responses is not disagreement, but not knowing enough about each statement to answer either way.

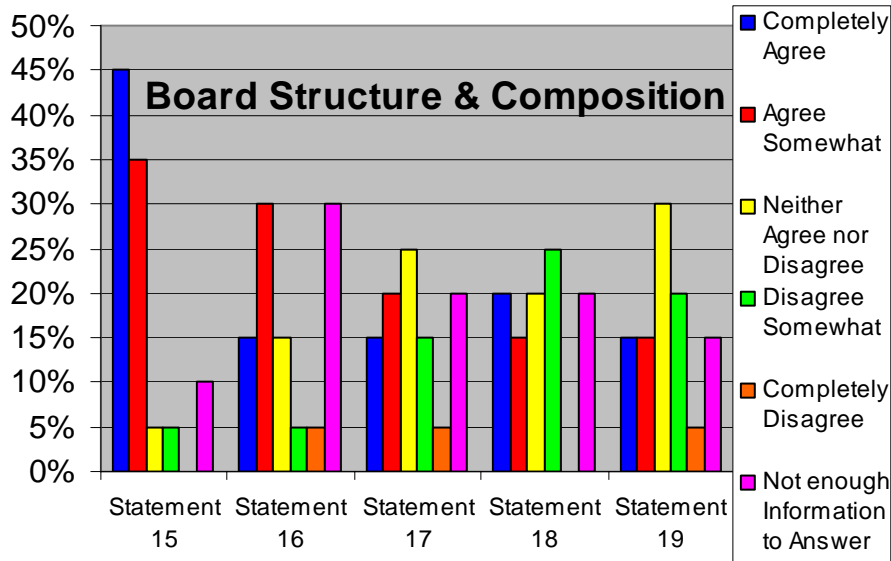
**FREQUENCIES Continued:**

**D. Board Composition & Representation**

The next five statements are an evaluation of the board’s diversity, structure, operations focus and vision (**Figure 5**).

- #15 The ECCJAB is broadly representative of all levels of government.
- #16 The ECCJAB has developed ground rules on how we will function and how board members will behave.
- #17 The goals of the ECCJAB are clear and manageable.
- #18 The Board member’s roles are clear.
- #19 The mission and vision of the ECCJAB are clearly stated and adhered to by the board members.

**Figure 5**



**#4 Gap Analysis**

There was not much disagreement in terms of these five statements. Each statement had at least a 30% level of agreement, with 80% of the respondents agreeing to Statement 15. However, there continues to be a group that does not have enough information to choose. Moreover, these questions address issues of structure, roles and goals, which may be clearer to the planning committee members than to the entire board membership. But, the frequency of indecisive answers is significant to the question of the board’s effectiveness.

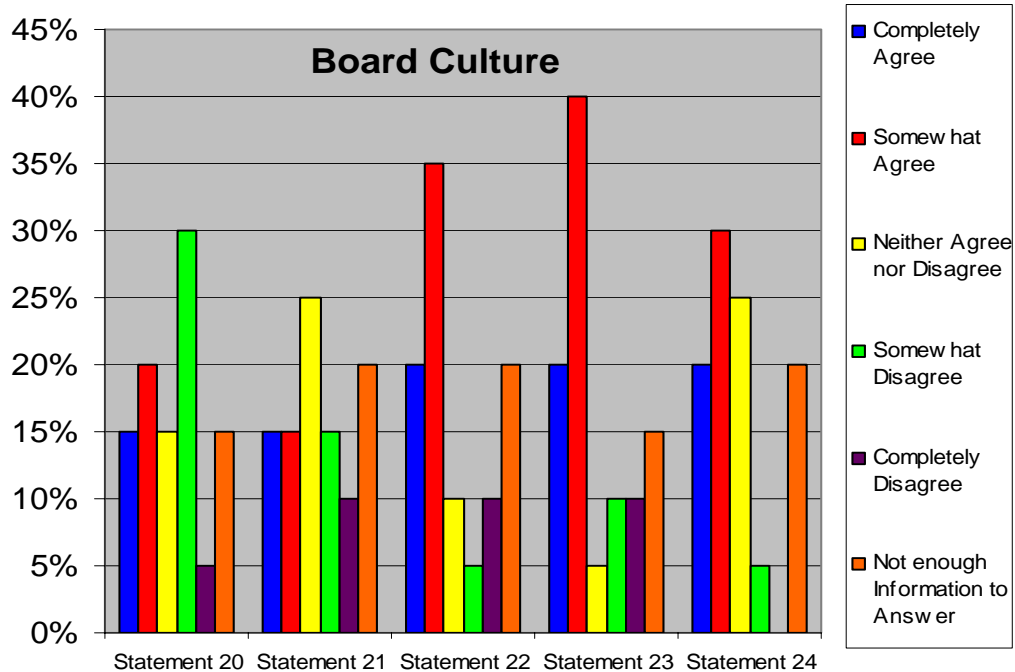
**FREQUENCIES Continued:**

**E. Board Culture**

The next five evaluation criteria measure the organizational culture of the ECCJAB. The values that characterize the board, and the manner in which meetings are conducted and issues are addressed, are also included (**Figure 6**).

- #20 Neutrality, credibility, and stability characterize the ECCJAB.
- #21 Board members deal with conflict openly and honestly in an effort to resolve it.
- #22 The ECCJAB has a collaborative climate; members enjoy trust, honesty, openness, consistency, respect & dignity.
- #23 Communication, ideas and information flow freely among Board members.
- #24 Board meetings are useful and productive.

**Figure 6**



**#5 Gap Analysis**

Again, one of the most significant findings is the frequency of “not enough information to answer,” responses. At least 15% of the respondents are uncertain as to the organizational climate of the board. The majority (35%) of respondents disagreed with the characteristics that describe the board in statement #20. The opinion of the board’s ability to resolve conflict is split. While only 25% of the respondents disagreed, a total of only 30% agree with statement #21. However, the remaining three statements gathered agreeable responses; 55% agreed with statement #22; 60% agreed with statement #23; 50% agreed with statement #24.

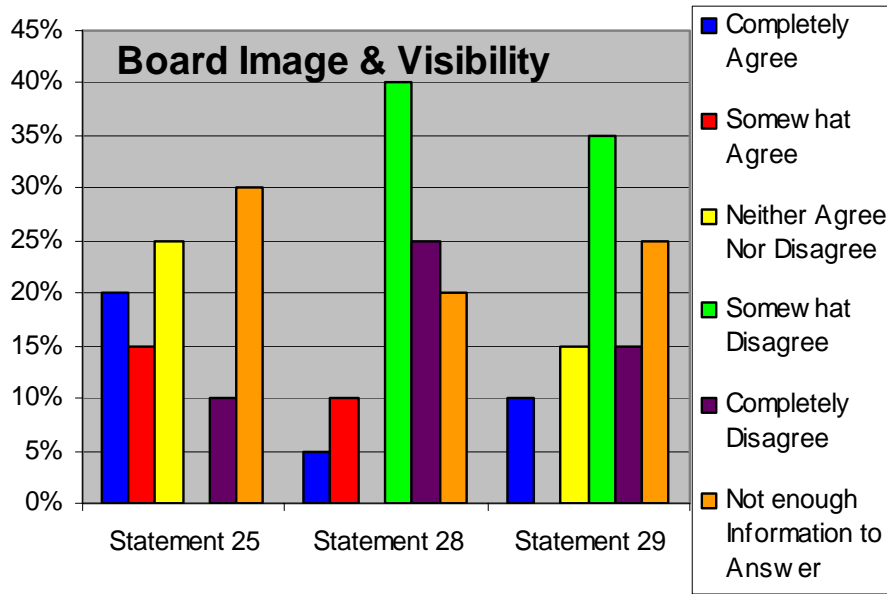
**FREQUENCIES Continued:**

**F. Public Image & Visibility of the ECCJAB**

The next group of statements measures the respondent’s perceptions of the public’s view of the ECCJAB. Also evaluated are the respondent’s perception of the board’s value to the public and other officials, and the impact of the board’s criminal justice initiatives in Erie County (**Figure 7**).

- #25 The ECCJAB’s external relationships are good.
- #28 The efforts of the ECCJAB are effective and recognized by the public.
- #29 Public officials and private citizens are familiar with the duties, responsibilities and functions of the ECCJAB.

**Figure 7**



**#6 Gap Analysis**

Again, a significant finding was the number of respondents who did not have enough information to express an opinion. However, this group of criteria is purposely vague, since there is no way for the respondents to gain feedback on public opinions. Therefore, the criteria are measuring perceptions of the respondents. However, there is collective (65%) disagreement to (#28) “The efforts of the ECCJAB are effective and recognized by the public,” as well as disagreement (50%) to (#29) “Public officials and private citizens are familiar with the duties, responsibilities and functions of the ECCJAB.” As far as responding to the general statement, (#25) “The ECCJAB’s external relationships are good,” a large proportion (30%) did not have enough information to give an opinion. This group of evaluation criteria emphasizes the gap between the public’s knowledge of the board and its initiatives and importance as criteria for effectiveness.

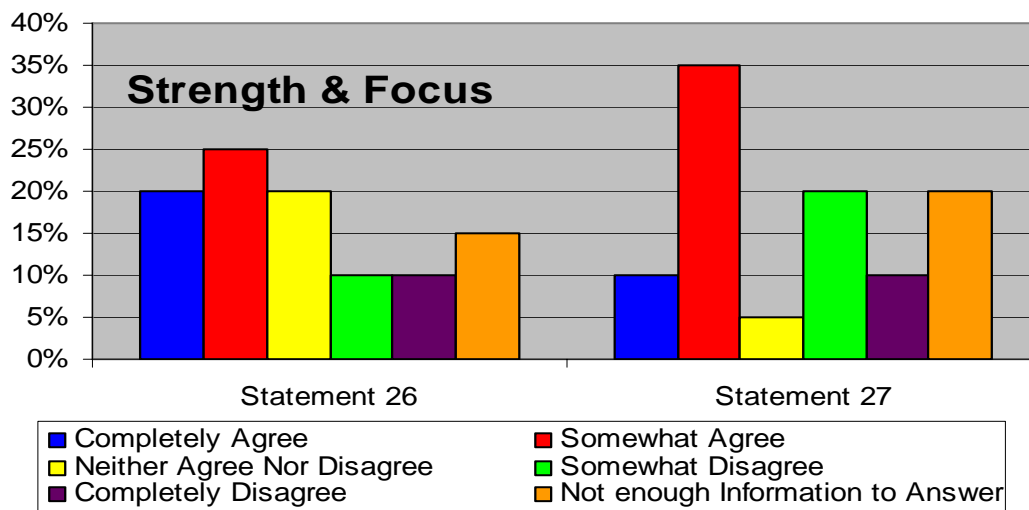
**FREQUENCIES Continued:**

**G. Issues and Main Focus of the ECCJAB**

The last two criteria for evaluation analyze the extent of which the respondent's feel the ECCJAB has a positive impact on the criminal justice system (**Figure 8**).

- #26 The ECCJAB is oriented towards “ends management,” board members are focused on the big picture issues.
- #27 Being on the ECCJAB helps me deal with issues concerning my department/area that I represent.

**Figure 8**



**#7 Gap Analysis**

The responses to these statements were agreeable. Although only 45% of the respondents agree to Statement #26, there was not a great deal of disagreement (20%). The same trend is seen in the response to Statement #27, 45% agreed and 30% disagreed. Again, there is a large proportion of respondents who felt they could not give an opinion due to a lack of knowledge about the common purpose of the board.

## ***CONCLUSION***

There was overall agreement from the respondents that the ECCJAB provides an open forum for discussion about criminal justice issues. The results indicated that most of the members feel free to communicate their ideas to the board and engage in healthy debates. According to the survey, program reporting at meetings was one of the most valuable aspects of the board. The respondents felt that they are especially well-informed about the Erie County Intermediate Punishment Program. According to the respondents, board meetings are a valuable resource for criminal justice program development and evaluation.

However, an important detail that the survey revealed is that most of the members lack knowledge about the ECCJAB. This implies that the mission, purpose and goals of the ECCJAB are unclear and unknown to the members. The focus of the board seems unclear. Another area of agreement among the members is that the public does not recognize the board and its functions. A more defined focus will give the members a strong mission that can be relayed to the public as an ECCJAB issue.

## **PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. In order to reinvest the member's focus in the ECCJAB it is recommended that a board retreat be planned to review by-laws, mission, vision, goals and strategies. This will give the board a chance to review its purpose and discuss issues of direction, membership and future initiatives. The board should emphasize its strengths and use them to develop a more specific operational plan.
2. The board should review the established criteria for effectiveness and focus on measuring the board's success using realistic benchmarks. Once these best-practice standards are set, the ECCJAB can practice them and communicate their efforts to the public. This will lead to continuously evaluating the success of their efforts.
3. The board should consider more outside involvement in its efforts. Members of the Neighborhood Watch program can be invited, or representatives from other established initiatives like the Drug and Alcohol Commission or the Chamber of Commerce.

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