NATIONAL JUVENILE JUSTICE NETWORK

FISCAL POLICY CENTER TOOLKIT

How to Calculate the Cost of a Youth Arrest

April 2013 (updated)

.

Table of Contents

Figures

Introduction

At a time when state and local governments face extreme fiscal challenges, it is imperative that reformers have access to credible and informed estimates of the costs of juvenile justice processing. Although some jurisdictions and organizations have been able to complete in-depth cost-benefit analyses of juvenile justice expenditures, such extensive analyses can be expensive and time-consuming. Nonetheless, reformers can arm themselves with valuable information on the costs of juvenile justice system processing by doing some basic research and calculations. The National Juvenile Justice Network's (NJJN's) Fiscal Policy Center's toolkit series shows readers how to use available budget data and processing statistics to estimate costs for different stages of the juvenile justice system.

About this Toolkit

This toolkit focuses on calculating costs at the point of arrest, a youth's first official contact with the justice system.[1] While we recommend that reformers first attempt to obtain estimates of arrest costs directly from relevant jurisdictions, there will be situations in which the information is unavailable, incomplete, or an independent calculation may be useful.

The Fiscal Policy Center (FPC) recognizes that there are many variables to consider and methods to calculate the cost of arrest as one aspect of a law enforcement agency's operations, and that practitioners may use other methods, based on the availability of information and other local factors. In this toolkit, the FPC proposes a straightforward approach to approximate the cost of an arrest. This approach provides reformers with a simple formula that produces consistent, accurate, and conservative results. How simple is it? Just multiply a law enforcement officer's average hourly rate (including benefits, support costs, and overhead costs) by the average number of hours it takes to arrest a youth.[2] It's that easy.

In the sections that follow, we will use budget data for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department in order to walk the reader through how to locate budget information, calculate an officer's average hourly rate, determine the number of hours per arrest, and, finally, estimate the cost of arrest.

---

[1] Note that the law enforcement budget data described in this document could be used to calculate the cost of an adult *or* a youth arrest, because it is not disaggregated by the age of arrestees. However, the average number of hours required to process an adult arrest may not be equivalent to the average number of hours to process a youth arrest, so arrest costs could vary according to the age of the arrestee. Also, as used here, "point of arrest" includes only the time required to arrest, transport, and book a youth. It does not include any investigation time prior to arrest. Finally, in some jurisdictions, arrest automatically includes an overnight stay in detention; calculating this additional cost will be covered in a future toolkit on calculating the cost of detaining youth.

[2] This method of calculating arrest costs is modeled after the approach used in Juliette R. Mackin et al., *Maryland Problem-Solving Courts Evaluation, Phase III: Integration of Results from Process, Outcome, and Cost Studies Conducted 2007-2009* (Portland: NPC Research, 2009), accessed November 9, 2012 at http://www.npcresearch.com/Files/Maryland_Phase_III_Integrated_Final_Report_1209.pdf.

How to Use this Toolkit

Reformers can use the cost estimates described here in a variety of ways, including any of the following:

- initiate more complex cost-benefit analyses aimed at understanding the effects of arrest policies on society, communities, and individual youth in the juvenile justice system;
- compare the cost of arrest in their jurisdictions with the cost of alternatives (e.g., diversion, issuance of citations);
- help in assessing the cost implications of proposals to expand enforcement activities (e.g., through curfew enforcement) or limit the funding for alternatives; or
- begin a discussion with local policy makers about ways to save costs when arrest rates decline.

How to Calculate the Cost of an Arrest
STEP ONE: LOCATE BUDGET INFORMATION

The first step in obtaining budget information for law enforcement officers is to determine which law enforcement agency or agencies (i.e., state, county, or city) are responsible for making arrests in the jurisdiction under consideration. This will determine, in part, which budgets you will need to obtain.

Next, you will need to find the appropriate budget information. A state, county, or city's budget comprises a set of accounts, usually completed on a yearly basis (the fiscal year). The budget includes money collected and spent in the past year, and outlines plans for spending and collection for the following year. The budget portion necessary for calculating arrest costs should be available in a proposed budget, annual budget, or fiscal report. Budgets with department-level (such as the Department of Public Safety) expenditures should be publicly available, and more often than not are easy to obtain on government websites; however, occasionally, you will need to request this information from agency administrators or city/county budget offices.

If the detailed department-level budget information you need is still unavailable after contacting the appropriate government budget offices or agency administrators, you may need to request the information through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. (For more information on how to file a FOIA request, see the FPC toolkit "How to File a Public Information Act Request," at http://bit.ly/SJqVuu.)

To search the internet for financial/budget reports use keywords such as:

>   your state/county/city/name and annual budget, annual budget report, annual fiscal report or annual budget report.

Figure 1, below, shows the results of conducting a search using the keywords "LA County Budget" to search for budget data on the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.
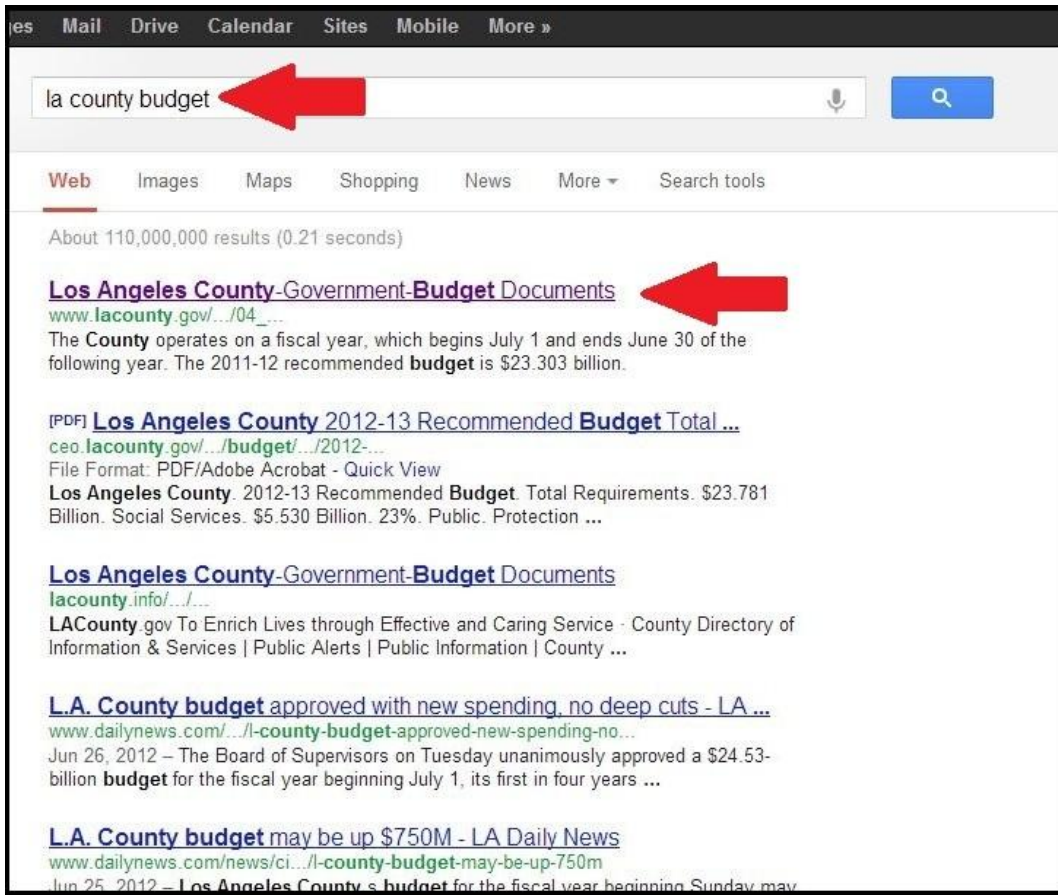
Figure 1: Screenshot of Internet search using keywords "LA County budget"

Once you have located the appropriate city, county or state budget report link, follow the link and search for annual or monthly allocations for law enforcement spending and overall income. Law enforcement budget summaries may be found in any of the following types of documents: an annual report, a fiscal report, a budget report, or an annual financial report. They may be labeled in a variety of ways, such as:

- department budget summary;
- personnel services budget summary;
- patrol budget summary; or
- detective budget summary.

STEP TWO: IDENTIFY LAW ENFORCEMENT SALARIES, BENEFITS, SUPPORT, AND OVERHEAD COSTS

Once you have retrieved the department-level budget, search for information on salaries, benefits, support costs, and overhead costs. These costs make up the total personnel costs that you will need in order to calculate an officer's average hourly rate.

Note that support and overhead costs—which include expenses for such things as overtime, supplies, uniforms, transportation, maintenance, and communications—may appear in the budget as separate line items that will need to be added individually to the cost of salaries and benefits; or they may be collapsed into one or two categories, such as "services and supplies" and "capital assets." For example, Figure 2, which shows the total budget summary for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, includes several aggregated cost categories. In this case, you would use the "Gross Total," which includes costs for "Personnel and Benefits," "Services and Supplies," "Other Charges," and "Capital Assets," to calculate an officer's average hourly rate.

Figure 2: Screenshot of the total budget for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's department, highlighting line items for salaries and benefits, support, and overhead costs

Keep in mind that budget documents usually have multiple columns, so you will need to identify the column that is most relevant for calculating an officer's average hourly rate. In Figure 2, for example, the "Actual" budget column refers to costs that have been incurred and can be reliably measured; the "Estimated" budget column outlines an approximation of the cost of an activity, occupation, program, or project, and is prepared for budgeting and planning purposes only; and the "Fiscal Year (FY)" columns show expected income and expenditures for the upcoming year. In this instance, you would use the information in the "Actual" budget column to calculate the average hourly rate of an officer in the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, because it provides data on actual costs.

Please note: A budget report may provide salary, benefits, support, and overhead information for specific law enforcement positions (e.g., patrol, detective, sheriff). If you know which types of officers are responsible for making youth arrests, this information may provide a more precise estimate of the cost of arrest than the general information on salaries contained in an agency's summary budget. However, if budget information is not broken out by personnel category, the total budget summary can also be used to provide a reasonable estimate of the cost of arrest.

STEP THREE: IDENTIFY THE NUMBER OF FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES

The next step is to identify the number of full-time employees (FTEs), or budgeted law enforcement positions. This information may be identified in the budget document as "Budgeted Positions," "Authorized Positions," or "FTEs (Full-Time Equivalents)." In Figure 3, the total number of full-time employees in the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (18,347 in FY 2009-10) is listed at the bottom of the "Actual" budget column, next to "Budgeted Positions."

Figure 3: Total number of budgeted positions in the LA County Sheriff's Department in FY 2009-10

STEP FOUR: DETERMINE THE AVERAGE HOURS NEEDED TO ARREST A YOUTH

The average time to arrest a youth (from point of arrest through police station booking) generally varies across jurisdictions from five to 14 hours.[3] Because of this variability, you will need to do a little digging to find out how long, on average, it takes to arrest a youth in your jurisdiction. There are several ways to obtain this information:

- Contact your local law enforcement agency's public information officer and/or community liaison officer.
- Contact your state's "juvenile justice specialist." Juvenile justice specialists work for your state's State Advisory Group (SAG), and can be a good source of information about your state's juvenile justice system. In order to locate the juvenile justice specialist in your state, go to http://www.juvjustice.org/states.html.
- Contact your local public defender's office.
- Look at cost-benefit or program reports prepared by a state administering agency (e.g., Office of Accountability, Office of Operations) or non-profit/academic research institutions that might have gathered data on arrests in your state or locality.

---

[3] Sources: L. Anthony Loman, *A Cost-Benefit Analysis of the St. Louis City Adult Felony Drug Court* (St. Louis: Institute of Applied Behavior, 2004), accessed November 13, 2012, http://www.courts.mo.gov/hosted/circuit22/Drug%20Court/costbenefit.pdf; Terry Fain, Susan Turner, and Greg Ridgeway, *Los Angeles County Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act: Fiscal Year 2008 – 2009 Report* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010), accessed November 13, 2012, http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR832.html; Pukstas, K., et.al., *Baltimore City Juvenile Drug Court Performance Evaluation: Program Process, Outcome and Cost Analyses: Final Report,* (Portland, OR: NPC Research, October 2006), accessed November 13, 2012, http://www.npcresearch.com/Files/BCJDC_process_report_11-09-06_final%20w%20cover.pdf; Christian Henrichson, Valerie Levshin, "Cost-Benefit Analysis of Raising the Age of Juvenile Jurisdiction in North Carolina" (New York: Vera institute of Justice, January 10, 2011), accessed November 13, 2012, http://www.vera.org/files/cost-benefit-analysis-of-raising-the-age-of-juvenile-jurisdiction-in-north-carolina.pdf.

STEP FIVE: DO THE MATH

In order to calculate the cost of an arrest of one youth, follow these simple steps:

Calculate the average annual cost of a police officer: Add the salaries, benefits, support and overhead costs. Divide the sum by the number of officers to get the average annual cost of one police officer.

Calculate the average hourly wage: Take the average annual cost of one police officer and divide by the number of work hours in a year (2,080 hours)[4] to get the average hourly wage.

Calculate the average cost of an arrest: Take the average hourly wage and multiply by the number of hours to arrest a youth to obtain the average cost of an arrest.

Add in additional fees, if known: If you have information on additional expenses associated with completing an arrest, such as fees for booking or urinalysis tests, these can be added at this point.

The following example uses the FY 2009-10 actual budget data from the total budget summary for the Los Angeles County Sherriff's Department shown in Figures 2 (page 7) and 3 (page 9) to calculate the cost of a juvenile arrest. For demonstration purposes, we have assumed that it takes six hours for one officer[5] to process a youth from arrest through booking; but as noted above, you will need to research the average time to complete an arrest in your jurisdiction to ensure that your estimate accurately reflects the circumstances in your jurisdiction.

To Start:

Select the "Gross Total" and "Budgeted Positions (FTEs)" line items from the Los Angeles Sheriff's budget summary. (Recall that the "Gross Total" represents the sum of salaries, benefits, support costs and overhead costs.)

Sheriff's Budget Summary FY 2009-10
Gross Total = $2,520,656,278 Budgeted Positions (FTEs) = 18,347

---

[4] In most organizations, employees work an eight-hour day, five days a week, for 52 weeks each year. This equates to 2,080 hours per year (8 x 5 x 52 = 2,080).

[5] Note that in some jurisdictions, it may be typical for multiple officers to participate in a single arrest.

Then:

Use the calculation below to determine the average yearly salary, including additional costs, for an officer in the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

Average Yearly Salary in FY 2009-10
Divide:
Law Enforcement Salaries, Benefits, Support and Overhead Costs Budgeted Positions (FTEs) or $2,520,656,278 18,347
Equals:
= $137,387 *average yearly salary, with supports, for one officer*

Next:

Divide the average yearly salary by the number of work hours during the year to determine the average cost per hour of a Los Angeles County Sheriff's officer's time.

Average Cost per Hour in FY 2009-10
Divide:
Average Yearly Salary: $137,387 Hours in a Full-Time Year or $137,387 2,080
Equals:
= $66.00 *per hour*

Lastly:

Multiply the officer's hourly rate by the hour(s) needed to process an arrest. If applicable, add any additional processing fees, routine fees (e.g., fees for booking or lab tests). The final sum is the cost of an individual arrest.

Cost of an Individual Arrest in FY 2009-10
Multiply:
Officer's Hourly Rate x Hour(s) to Process Arrest:
$66.00 x 6 hours = $396
Add in:
Additional Routine Fees (e.g., Booking Fee) *if applicable:*[6]
$500
$396 + $500
Equals:
= $896 *per arrest*[7]

The final cost—$896—represents the average cost of an arrest of one youth by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.[8]

---

[6] Some local agencies may apply a booking fee in order to recover costs associated with booking individuals into detention facilities.

[7] Note, again, that this estimate is based on the assumption that the average arrest takes six hours to complete and that typical booking fees equal $500 per arrestee. Your costs may differ from those estimated here, depending on the actual time required to complete an arrest in your jurisdiction and the actual costs of additional routine fees.

[8] This estimate is less than the one reported by the RAND Corporation. (See Terry Fain, Susan Turner, and Greg Ridgeway, *Los Angeles County Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act: Fiscal Year 2008 – 2009 Report* [Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010], accessed November 13, 2012, http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR832.html.) For that report, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department estimated that a typical youth arrest required 13.5 hours (including time for investigation, case filing, and supervisory review) and involved multiple officers with different rates of pay.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. ## How can I use information about what it costs to arrest a youth in my jurisdiction to advance reform?

    The toolkit will help you calculate the average cost to arrest a youth in your jurisdiction, which can help you estimate the potential savings associated with policies that reduce youth arrests, or the estimated costs associated with policies that lead to increased youth arrests. Armed with that information, you can begin a conversation with local law enforcement officials about how a reduction in youth arrests can translate into a reduction in law enforcement expenditures.

2. ## Is it preferable to use budget information only for the specific law enforcement positions (*i.e.,* patrol officers) responsible for arresting and processing youth, or information that averages expenses for the department or agency as a whole?

    If you know that specific law enforcement divisions have primary responsibility for arresting and processing youth in your jurisdiction, it is desirable to calculate officers' average annual salaries using budget information (i.e., salary, fringe, and overhead data) for those divisions. However, if budget data on specific law enforcement divisions are not available, it is still possible to use the total agency budget (as shown in the toolkit) to compute a reliable salary estimate.

3. ## What should I do if my jurisdiction defines an "arrest" to include more than arrest, transportation, and booking, as described here?

    If a typical youth arrest in your jurisdiction involves additional activities, such as an overnight stay in detention, you will want to calculate the cost of those activities and add the cost to the cost of arrest calculated via the method outlined in the toolkit. If the additional costs cannot be calculated (e.g., due to a lack of data), you will want to stipulate that the costs are not included in your estimate and that yours is a conservative estimate of the cost of a youth arrest in your jurisdiction.

4. If policy changes I'm working on will reduce the number of youth arrested in my jurisdiction, can I work through the toolkit and determine how much money the police department will save?

The toolkit will help you calculate the average cost to arrest a youth in your jurisdiction, which can help in calculating the potential savings associated with a reduction in the number of youth arrests. Keep in mind, however, that law enforcement agencies must maintain a budgetary cushion to accommodate fluctuations in the number of arrests, so the drop in youth arrests would have to be substantial and persistent before it is likely to result in a significant reduction in law enforcement expenditures. In addition, law enforcement budgets are not defined solely by the number of arrests an agency makes: the budgets also provide for fixed costs such as building maintenance, operations, and rental fees, which exist even if there is a decline in the number of arrests. Hence, estimating how a reduction in arrests might translate into a reduction in law enforcement costs will undoubtedly require you to contact your local law enforcement agency to discuss how arrest rates are factored into the construction of their budgets.

Conclusion

Although calculating costs should never be the sole method for determining the best options for youth in trouble with the law, understanding how money is spent can be instrumental in demonstrating that wiser spending often goes hand-in-hand with more humane, effective, and developmentally appropriate responses to youth crime. This toolkit has shown you how to calculate a reliable estimate of the average cost to arrest a youth in your jurisdiction.

Future toolkits in this series will demonstrate how to calculate the cost of processing a youth at subsequent stages in the juvenile justice system, such as detention, court processing, and incarceration. Combined, these toolkits will help you calculate the overall expense of sending a youth through the juvenile justice system.

Questions? Need Technical Assistance?

To get answers to questions about this toolkit—or if your organization is a member of the National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN) and you need technical assistance with finding, analyzing or presenting budget data—please contact NJJN's Fiscal Policy Center. The Fiscal Policy Center helps youth justice reformers use fiscal tools to promote the effective and appropriate treatment of youth in trouble with the law. Through trainings, technical assistance, and toolkits, the Fiscal Policy Center ensures that states and local jurisdictions receive the highest return for their public safety investments.

For assistance, please contact the staff of NJJN's Fiscal Policy Center:

Cathy Conly, Director
202-467-0864 Ext. 126
conly@njjn.org

Julius C. Chaidez, Fiscal Policy Associate
202-467-0864 Ext. 129
chaidez@njjn.org