NIJ's "Sentinel Events Initiative"

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Different ways to look at the world --

- <u>My</u> success *vs*. <u>Our</u> success

- <u>My</u> failings *vs*. <u>Our</u> failings

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Innovative industries

- Hospital medicine

- Aviation

- Nuclear power

- Military

- *Criminal Justice ??*

Sentinel Events Essentials

- "Sentinel Event" →

- Sentinel Event "reviews" (SERs) →

- NIJ's Sentinel Events Initiative (SEI) →

Definition – "Sentinel Event"

An error, bad outcome, or even a "near miss" (*a.k.a.* "good catch") that signals underlying <u>system</u> weaknesses

> *Examples: wrongful conviction, homicide-while-under-supervision, cold-cold case, "too-long" incarceration, wrongful release, …*

In essence:

1. Everyone agrees it shouldn't have happened <u>and</u> want to ensure it doesn't happen again.
2. "Iceberg"

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Definition – "Sentinel Event Review"

A forward looking, non-blaming examination conducted by an inclusive "all-stakeholders" team in search of system improvements to make bad outcomes less likely to re-occur

- Scope/form of review
    - System-wide (<u>or</u> within a "stove-pipe")
    - Flex to suit the event
    - Coming soon: our "Model A" specs

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Key Research Question #1:

"Can a SER be done in a CJ setting?"

1. Can the parts of the justice system participate fully in a non-blaming, forward-looking, all-stakeholders approach that relies on "learning from error" in order to strengthen the system?

Key Research Question #2:

"Does a SE approach have measurable, meaningful outcomes?"

2. Does such an approach help the CJS achieve desired public safety dividends such as greater access to justice, more efficient processes, and enhanced perceptions of legitimacy?

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Key Research Question #3:

"Can it be sustained?"

3. If proven efficacious, can a sentinel events approach be sustained over time and become routine process in state and local justice systems?

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"If you want to <u>learn</u> something, <u>do</u> something" –

The recent SEI "beta" project

- Goal – field-test the idea of a sentinel event review
- 3 sites – Philadelphia, Milwaukee, and Baltimore

- Objectives:
  - Hypothesis #1 (can it be done)
  - Challenges
  - Dividends
  - Features of our "Model A" SER

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Next Steps

- "Lessons learned" publication based on Beta sites

- National symposium for local teams

- Ongoing annual research RFP on sentinel events

- Further field tests
  - Greater rigor
  - Measurable outcomes

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Questions?

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Thanks!

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