

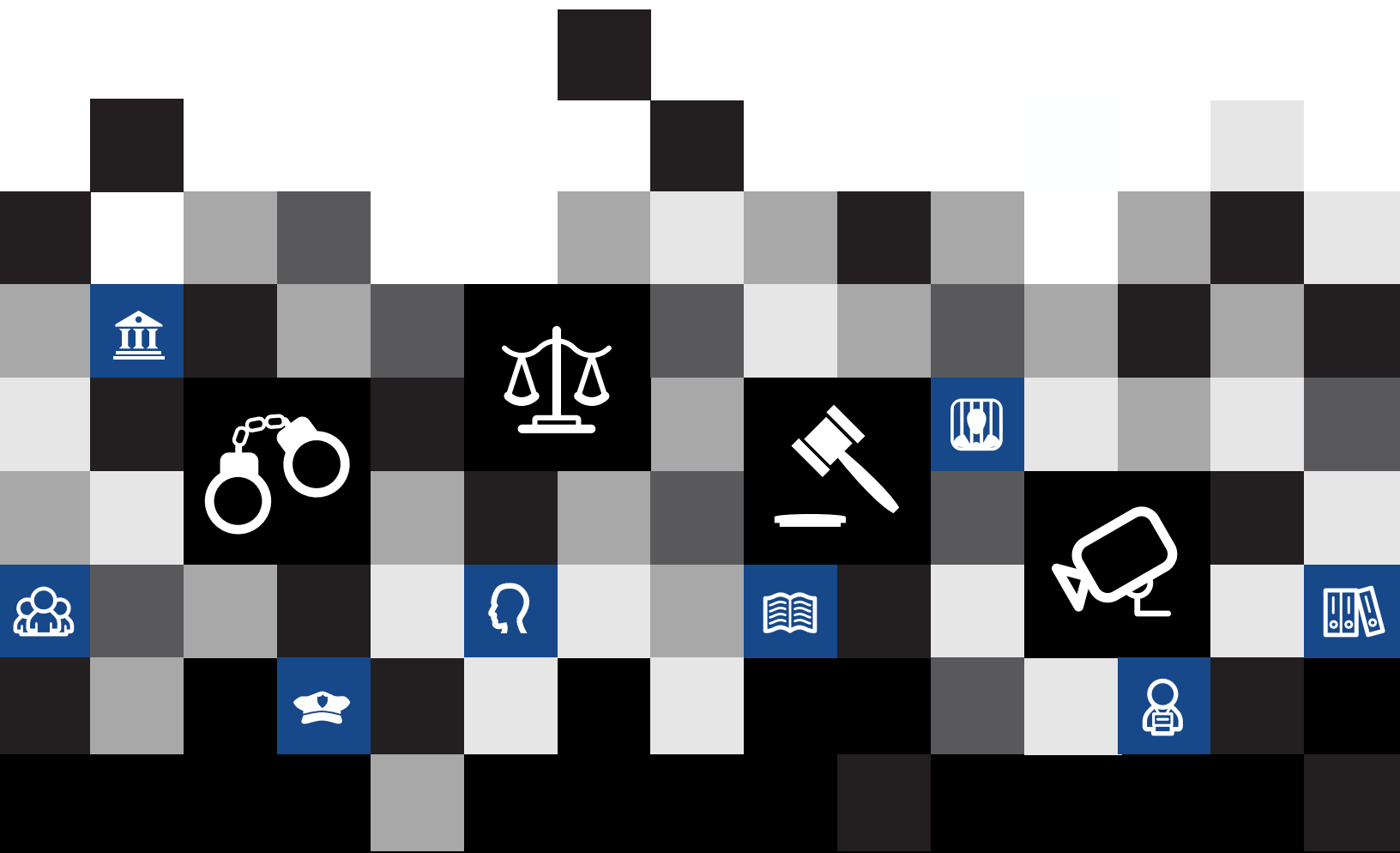


NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE

# Corrections

## Strategic Research Plan

2018-2023



**U.S. Department of Justice  
Office of Justice Programs  
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Washington, DC 20531**

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## Message From the Director

Over the past few years, high-profile events have demonstrated the complexity and dangerous nature of corrections, and highlighted the difficulty of crafting comprehensive policy solutions. There are many factors at play that are outside of the control of the corrections system: who is sent to a facility, how long they stay, why they are there, and what issues they bring with them. Yet corrections personnel are tasked with keeping these individuals safe and providing them with tools and opportunities to ensure that when they leave a correctional facility, they successfully reintegrate into their communities.

This work is challenging and often hidden from public view. In this plan, NIJ is encouraging increased empirical attention to the field of corrections. This plan establishes a five-year framework to better understand the highly interrelated areas of corrections personnel, organizational practices, and the experiences of adults and juveniles involved with the system. The research that comes out of this plan is intentionally policy and practice relevant to inform innovative solutions, improve the corrections environment, and assist corrections practitioners in successfully implementing their mission.

Corrections agencies must maintain a highly qualified workforce that is adept at responding to a myriad of issues on a daily basis. Our first strategic priority relates to research that will optimize workforce development for these personnel. We are committed to supporting research to better understand how to optimize workforces and deliver effective training to maximize the safety, health, and wellness of corrections staff and facilitate an environment in which they can thrive.

Too often, our efforts are driven by anecdote rather than evidence. Our second priority focuses on research to enhance corrections practices. We will support research to help understand organizational operations, climate, and the impact of external influences on corrections operations.



Finally, we will promote and support research to examine the experiences of individuals and populations involved with the corrections system. Many complex and interrelated factors contribute to an individual ending up in prison or jail. We want to understand the entry and trajectory of individuals within the corrections system, as well as the process of offender reintegration. We also want to specifically examine the experience of juveniles to better understand the challenges unique to this population.

No one organization, entity, or discipline can be fully effective working in isolation. This plan will guide NIJ's efforts over the next five years to fund research and engage in partnerships and collaborations to help us better understand and improve our complex corrections system, to the ultimate end of increased public safety.

David B. Muhlhausen, Ph.D.  
Director, National Institute of Justice

# Introduction

## About the National Institute of Justice

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) — the research, development, and evaluation agency of the U.S. Department of Justice — is dedicated to improving knowledge and understanding of crime and justice issues through science. NIJ provides objective and independent knowledge and science-based tools to reduce crime and promote justice, particularly at the state and local levels.

## Corrections Research Mission

NIJ's mission for corrections research is to develop knowledge and science-based tools to enhance public safety and the successful reintegration of offenders. This will be accomplished by examining the safe and secure incarceration of offenders, effective community supervision, and strategies to reintegrate offenders into our communities. From its inception 50 years ago, NIJ has encouraged research on issues affecting corrections systems. As corrections systems evolve, NIJ will continue to develop tools and knowledge to help corrections practitioners faithfully execute their duties and fulfill their important mission.

## Corrections Strategic Research Plan Purpose

NIJ has developed the Corrections Strategic Research Plan to describe NIJ's current and projected efforts to help corrections practitioners and policymakers enhance public safety. The strategic goals outlined in the plan are interrelated and vital to finding solutions to the challenges of corrections. This document should be of interest to researchers (academia, government, and industry); federal, state, local, tribal, and international government partners; and justice policymaker and practitioner communities. Findings from the activities that fall within this strategic plan will be disseminated among these constituents and partners in ways designed to achieve the greatest impact.

## A Call for Collaboration

The research agenda included within this strategic research plan intentionally spans many scientific disciplines. The breadth of research is driven by the magnitude of questions that need to be addressed within the criminal and juvenile justice systems.<sup>1</sup> NIJ envisions that the research resulting from this plan will require interdisciplinary collaboration between many stakeholder groups, including the following:

- Individuals from academic and higher education institutions, think tanks, and organizations that engage in empirical research and policy assessment.
- Agencies directly responsible for individuals under corrections supervision and, within those agencies, staff with security, clinical, and administrative responsibilities.
- Agencies (both governmental and nongovernmental) that provide services to individuals under corrections supervision.
- Professional associations and organizations that support the field.

This plan will also require partnerships between stakeholders from a variety of disciplines and practitioners. Finally, reflecting the need for collaboration among researchers, NIJ will seek partnerships with other federal agencies and institutions that support research relevant to criminal and juvenile justice applications. These partnerships could include cosponsoring research awards, convening meetings of key researchers and practitioners, peer-to-peer learning, networking, and providing criminal justice system expertise in discussions and meetings that pertain to corrections.

## Scope and Definitions

The *Corrections Strategic Research Plan 2018-2023* focuses on three key areas: corrections personnel, corrections organizations, and individuals under correctional supervision. The plan will be limited to (1) adults under supervision in institutional or community corrections settings, including jail detainees who have not been sentenced,<sup>2</sup> (2) juveniles who are incarcerated in adult corrections facilities,<sup>3</sup> and (3) juveniles who are temporarily detained or committed after

<sup>1</sup> In an effort to strengthen its research program and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of carrying out its work, the Office of Justice Programs, under the direction of the Department of Justice, is transferring the research and evaluation functions currently managed by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to NIJ in fiscal year 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Programs and services specifically designed for only pretrial detainees (those held in jail who have not been sentenced by the court) are outside the scope of this plan.

<sup>3</sup> The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention defines juveniles as those who are at or below the upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction in a particular state.



adjudication and held in juvenile residential placement facilities.<sup>4</sup> Under the current plan, jail detainees and juveniles sentenced as adults, as well as juveniles in residential placement centers, will be treated as special populations. Additionally, examination of diversion programs will be limited to alternatives to incarceration — for example, probation, home confinement, day reporting, and location monitoring.

## Scope

The purpose of this plan is to outline NIJ’s strategy to support research regarding the role and potential of corrections to contribute to the enhancement of public safety and rehabilitation through the delivery of services and treatment. The plan broadly defines corrections to include jails, prisons, juvenile residential facilities, and community corrections, which may include probation, parole, and other corrections programs involving individuals under criminal and juvenile justice supervision in the community. These settings differ in important ways — for example, structure and organization; staff working conditions, training, and other developmental support; organizational goals and strategies; availability and delivery of programming and treatment; and differences in the populations under supervision. This plan points out these differences and highlights special considerations where appropriate.

The technology and sophistication of corrections strategies are advancing. Currently, there are many corrections schemes, relying on both institutional and community corrections to confine and supervise individuals when needed and to support their reintegration into the community. The essential components of any corrections system include the interventions undertaken, the workforce interacting with those under corrections supervision, the corrections organization, and the individuals under corrections supervision. Each component requires dedicated inquiry and is addressed in this plan.

## Definition of Terms

- **Corrections functions** refer to the roles carried out by corrections organizations. These functions include (1) safe and secure management of offenders under corrections supervision, (2) creation of safer communities through the reduction of reoffending along with effective community supervision, and (3) provision of opportunities for the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders into the community.

<sup>4</sup> Juvenile residential placement facilities vary considerably across and within jurisdictions by characteristics such as type, size, structure, security arrangements, ownership, and operation. For example, juvenile facility types may include detention centers, runaway and homeless shelters, reception/diagnostic centers, group homes, ranch/wilderness camps, boot camps, residential treatment centers, and training school/long-term secure facilities.

- **Corrections organizations** include jails, prisons, juvenile residential facilities, and community corrections agencies at the federal, state, local, and tribal levels.<sup>5</sup> Jails are short-term facilities that are usually administered by a local law enforcement agency and that are intended for adults but sometimes hold juveniles before or after adjudication. Jail inmates usually have a sentence of less than one year or are being held pending a trial, awaiting sentencing, or awaiting transfer to another facility after a conviction. Prisons are long-term confinement facilities run by a state or the federal government that typically hold offenders with sentences of more than one year. Juvenile residential facilities include both secure and nonsecure facilities where youth are either temporarily detained by the court or committed after adjudication for an offense.
- **Community corrections** refers to the supervision of an individual, typically deemed to be at low risk of reoffending, serving a criminal sentence or juvenile disposition order in an unrestricted or minimally restrictive community setting that is not a secure facility.<sup>6</sup> The two main types of community corrections supervision are probation and parole, which can also include nonprofit and private service providers who contract with government entities to provide supervision, programming, and/or treatment to individuals in a community setting.
- **Corrections services** refer to the diverse functions provided by corrections staff, organizations, and often volunteers to support the inmates' or juveniles' adjustment, development, and preparation for successful community reentry upon release. Services include but are not limited to housing, health and behavioral health services, substance abuse treatment, religious services, education, career preparation, family reunification, employment readiness programs, and employment assistance. Services provided vary, depending on the correctional facility and offenders' needs.
- **Offender outcomes** may include but are not limited to institutional conduct; compliance with and violations of supervision conditions; revocations from probation or parole supervision; program participation and completion; treatment progress; prosocial milestones (e.g., obtaining employment and housing, demonstrating academic engagement, or participating in structured activities); and recidivism (rearrest, reconviction, or recommitment to a jail, prison, or juvenile residential facility).
- **Organizational climate** refers to the mood expressed within an organization that results from the physical environment and the nature of interactions between members within the group, their constituencies, and other outsiders — in this case, corrections personnel, offenders, and the public.<sup>7</sup> Organizational climate is also a result of

<sup>5</sup> In this plan, specific systems of corrections (e.g., jails or prisons) will not be referenced in the research agenda action items to avoid limiting discussion to a specific corrections setting. Private prison systems and privately operated juvenile facilities would be subject to evaluation under this plan.

<sup>6</sup> See Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Terms and Definitions: Corrections," <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=tdtp&tid=1>.

<sup>7</sup> Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

the culture that drives relationships, norms, and policies within an organization. It may also reflect an agency's state of practice, specifically data-driven and evidence-based decision-making versus surveillance-focused approaches.

- **Public safety** refers to the welfare and protection of the general public and the prevention of and protection from threats affecting the safety and security of corrections personnel and individuals under corrections supervision.
- **Staff outcomes** may include but are not limited to levels of recruitment, promotion, selection, retention, and attrition; job satisfaction; perceived organizational and co-worker support; misconduct; levels of morale; staff performance; and commitment to the corrections organization.

## Strategic Priorities

- I. Promote and support research to optimize workforce development for corrections personnel.
- II. Promote and support research to enhance corrections practices.
- III. Promote and support research to examine the experiences of individuals involved with the corrections system.



# Strategic Priority I: Promote and support research to optimize workforce development for corrections personnel.

NIJ is committed to promoting research that will build knowledge to develop and maintain a corrections workforce that is composed of qualified and committed personnel. NIJ is particularly interested in factors that influence and motivate members of the corrections workforce today and attract viable candidates to the corrections profession. NIJ will promote research to assess the knowledge and skills of personnel required to work in diverse corrections environments. NIJ will also evaluate the impact of training and education programs designed to develop and maintain an optimized workforce.



## Background

It is critical for corrections agencies to be staffed with well-trained, educated, skilled, and resilient staff who can support agencies' missions to improve public safety. Yet challenges abound. Corrections agencies report that there are concerns with recruiting and retaining qualified staff. In many instances, this can lead to issues with understaffing. Understaffed agencies may have to extend shifts or rely on overtime to ensure safe and secure facilities, but overtime has implications for agencies' budgets and for the stress levels and wellness of staff. A related issue is working conditions, which can be difficult. Staff who work in correctional institutions may face stress, violence or threats of violence, low public regard of the profession, and a culture that may not support self-care. Because corrections personnel are on the front line, their daily experiences — understudied both in the community and in institutions — merit investigation.

## Objectives

The objectives of Strategic Priority I are to inform and support a corrections workforce that can enhance public safety and support the reintegration of individuals under corrections supervision. The research will involve a comprehensive assessment of a variety of corrections workforce components to identify the challenges and promising practices of workforce recruitment and development, examine the impact of academic and in-service training and education, and support practices and technologies to advance officer safety.

# Strategic Priority I

## Action Plan

### OBJECTIVES

#### **Objective I.1: Support research to optimize the corrections workforce.<sup>8</sup>**

- Research the background, skills, education, training, and experience needed for today’s corrections workforce, and identify emerging needs.
- Examine the influence of working conditions in corrections environments on staff outcomes.
- Evaluate how job satisfaction and stress affect staff performance.
- Assess the impact of exposure to trauma (e.g., suicide of inmates or staff) on corrections personnel.
- Study the influence of leadership and communication on staff performance, particularly the willingness to implement new initiatives.
- Research the influence of staff attitudes regarding their duties and the corrections mission on work performance.
- Examine the association between pre-employment characteristics of corrections personnel and the workforce cycle (recruitment, selection, retention, promotion, assignment, attrition, and performance).
- Research the workforce cycle and identify challenges and promising practices.
- Assess the impact of the availability of resources (e.g., time and funding) on workforce development.

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<sup>8</sup> Several action items in Objective I.1 are analogous to those included in NIJ’s *Safety, Health, and Wellness Strategic Research Plan 2016-2021*. The action items included here support NIJ’s continued efforts to promote research on improving safety within the criminal justice system and the health and wellness of criminal justice personnel — in this case, corrections personnel. To read NIJ’s *Safety, Health, and Wellness Strategic Research Plan 2016-2021*, see <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/250153.pdf>.

## OBJECTIVES (CONTINUED)

### **Objective 1.2: Promote research on corrections workforce training and education.**

- Assess the impact of the availability of resources (e.g., time and funding) on workforce development.
  - Evaluate the impact of officer training (e.g., academy, infield, recertification, and specialized training) and training curricula on the performance of corrections personnel.
  - Examine the relationship between training and the corrections culture.
  - Examine the impact of corrections researcher-practitioner partnerships developed to improve corrections training programs.
  - Examine and assess the impact of corrections training on cultural competencies.
  - Research the impact of supervisory and leadership training on the performance of corrections personnel.
  - Study, develop, and evaluate training technologies (e.g., mobile, video-based, e-learning, augmented and virtual learning environments) designed to advance officer performance and support learning among corrections personnel.
  - Evaluate the impact of education on the performance of corrections personnel.
-



## Strategic Priority II: Promote and support research to enhance corrections practices.

NIJ remains focused on supporting research that will enhance corrections practices. This focus entails a robust research agenda that includes corrections operations, organizational performance, effectiveness and efficiency of corrections operations, organizational leadership, organizational climate, and corrections strategies. This priority addresses issues relevant to both institutional and community corrections and seeks to explore the conditions driving innovation across the entire correctional system.

### Background

Corrections organizations serve an essential role in the criminal justice system. They improve public safety by securing individuals who have been deemed a danger to the community and work to prevent future crime and victimization by providing services to address the criminogenic needs of adults and juveniles under their supervision. The core mission, duties, and responsibilities of a corrections system are complex and diverse. Corrections organizations need support from robust research evidence to translate policy into practice and adopt more effective practices. With this support, corrections organizations can implement effective strategies that work to create an environment that is safe and secure for personnel and offenders, is conducive to reducing recidivism and misconduct, and that improves public safety.

### Objectives

The objectives supporting Strategic Priority II build on the strengths of NIJ's past research agenda. NIJ is specifically interested in understanding and supporting corrections practices in institutional and community settings. These objectives focus on organization, operations, leadership, and strategies. Additionally, the focus on organizational outcomes and performance encompasses all of these topics.



# Strategic Priority II Action Plan

## OBJECTIVES

### **Objective II.1: Promote and support research to enhance the operations of corrections organizations.<sup>9</sup>**

- Identify and examine practices that enhance corrections operations.
- Examine how practices are adopted and diffused in corrections organizations.
- Study the effects of organizational and management structure on corrections operations.
- Examine the impact of the architectural design of institutions and community corrections settings on safety and security.
- Assess the use of technology in corrections organizations.<sup>10</sup>
- Assess the use and impact of performance measurement systems and analytics on corrections staff performance.
- Examine the data management infrastructure of the corrections system and its impact on operations.
- Research and develop requirements for next-generation corrections information systems based upon correctional and external stakeholder input.
- Assess how organizations determine staffing levels and offender assignment, and their impact on safety and security.
- Examine the impact of varying offender population characteristics on corrections operations.

<sup>9</sup> Corrections organizations refer to jails, prisons, juvenile residential facilities, and community corrections agencies at the federal, state, local, and tribal levels.

<sup>10</sup> In the current plan, technology includes but is not limited to personal protective equipment and communications equipment (e.g., radios).

## OBJECTIVES (CONTINUED)

### **Objective II.2: Examine the operations of corrections.**

- Measure the impact of programs, services, and strategies on safety and security.
- Examine the effectiveness of corrections programming that aims to reduce inmate misconduct and recidivism.
- Examine the influence of organizational characteristics on the implementation and sustainability of corrections innovations.
- Research the influence of organizational characteristics on the implementation and delivery of programs and services.
- Assess the accuracy and reliability of risk assessment methods on the congruence and delivery of services.
- Study the ability and effectiveness of risk assessment methods to inform corrections decision-making.
- Identify the extent of and barriers to adoption and implementation of risk assessments in corrections settings.
- Examine the influence of resource allocation strategies on offender assignments and referrals to services.
- Examine the impact of the architectural design of institutions and community corrections settings on the delivery of services.
- Examine how institutional history (e.g., riots and other critical incidents) may impact the delivery of services.
- Assess how staffing levels, staff assignments, and offender population size and characteristics affect delivery of services.

### **Objective II.3: Examine the impact of organizational climate on corrections operations.**

- Examine how institutional history (e.g., riots and other critical incidents) impacts organizational climate and performance.
- Understand how corrections leadership influences organizational climate.
- Assess the impact of diversity on organizational climate.
- Study the influence of organizational climate on staff outcomes.
- Examine the characteristics that allow corrections organizations to perform more effectively.

## OBJECTIVES (CONTINUED)

### **Objective II.4: Examine organizational and systemic conditions that impact public safety.**

- Examine corrections costs and their impact on public safety.
- Evaluate strategies to enhance information sharing and intelligence gathering within corrections and between other agencies.
- Assess the role of corrections in critical incident responses (e.g., riots, active shooters, and natural disasters).

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### **Objective II.5: Study the impact of external influences on corrections operations.**

- Study the impact of budgets, statutory or regulatory policies, and court decisions on corrections operations and public safety.
- Measure how evaluations of legislative initiatives impact corrections operations.
- Examine the influence of external entities on corrections operations.
- Examine the impact of institution closures and downsizing on corrections and public safety outcomes.
- Examine the impact of corrections partnerships on public safety.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Partnerships may include but are not limited to researcher-practitioner partnerships and collaborations among criminal justice agencies, communities, and nongovernmental organizations.

## Strategic Priority III: Promote and support research to examine the experiences of individuals involved with the corrections system.

NIJ seeks to provide evidence about how offenders experience corrections settings and their process of returning to communities and families.<sup>12</sup> The overwhelming majority of offenders will be released from correctional supervision at some point. The research agenda in the current plan aims to provide evidence on how an individual's experience during incarceration and interactions with staff may mitigate the likelihood that he or she will commit additional crimes.

### Background

NIJ has supported a range of research in this area, including evaluations of federal re-entry initiatives and assessments of technologies to support public safety and reintegration goals, including electronic monitoring, video visitation, and kiosks, among other technologies. With these investments, NIJ has made notable contributions to assist criminal justice and corrections practitioners as they consider how best to achieve their public safety goals. As recidivism rates remain stable and offenders continue to cycle in and out of corrections settings, there are considerable gaps for NIJ and the field of criminal and juvenile justice to address in the research.



<sup>12</sup> NIJ's *Safety, Health, and Wellness Strategic Research Plan 2016-2021* includes a diverse set of objectives that support research on individuals as they interact with the criminal justice system. Importantly, the plan includes specific research objectives on offender reintegration. See the *Safety, Health, and Wellness Strategic Research Plan 2016-2021* for more individual-based objectives and action items.

## Objectives

The objectives of Strategic Priority III aim to contribute to the breadth of knowledge about offender decision-making, the process of desistance, and offender reintegration. This strategic priority seeks to move beyond examining the characteristics of individuals engaged with the criminal and juvenile justice and corrections systems — toward a better understanding of how to prevent individuals from entering the corrections system and how to better prepare incarcerated individuals for their re-entry into the community.



# Strategic Priority III

## Action Plan

### OBJECTIVES

**Objective III.1: Examine the entry and trajectory of individuals within corrections systems.**

- Research the impact of entry, including cyclic re-entry and entry, into corrections systems on short- and long-term individual outcomes.
- Examine the impact of alternatives to detention or incarceration on offender outcomes.
- Explore the impact of statutory and regulatory policies (e.g., decarceration initiatives, sentencing schemes, and alternatives to sentencing) on offender outcomes.
- Examine the impact of organizational policies and practices on offender outcomes.
- Study the effects of confinement on offender outcomes.

**Objective III.2: Promote research that examines the process of offender reintegration.**

- Study the effect of the provision of release planning on offender reintegration.
- Evaluate the impact of strategies that promote prosocial behavior and desistance among offenders.
- Examine the influence of individual factors on offender reintegration.
- Examine the influence of community characteristics and resources on offender reintegration.
- Examine the effectiveness of community supervision on offender outcomes.
- Research measures and milestones of re-entry success, early indicators of re-entry distress, and barriers to sustaining successful re-entry.
- Support research on the use of technology to promote offender reintegration.

# Acknowledgments

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