

The author(s) shown below used Federal funds provided by the U.S. Department of Justice and prepared the following final report:

Document Title: FY 2011 Second Chance Act Adult Offender Reentry Demonstration Projects Evaluability Assessment, Executive Summary

Author(s): Janeen Buck Willison, Jennifer Hardison Walters, Lindsey Cramer, Jocelyn Fontaine, Aaron Horvath, Colleen Owens, Shelli Rossman, Kelly Walsh, Kelle Barrick, Erin Kennedy, Lara Markovits, Monica Sheppard

Document No.: 243978

Date Received: October 2013

Award Number: 2012-R2-CX-0032

This report has not been published by the U.S. Department of Justice. To provide better customer service, NCJRS has made this Federally-funded grant report available electronically.

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FY 2011 Second Chance Act Adult Offender Reentry Demonstration Projects Evaluability Assessment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Janeen Buck Willison (Urban Institute) and
Jennifer Hardison Walters (RTI International)*

Urban Institute

Lindsey Cramer
Jocelyn Fontaine
Aaron Horvath
Colleen Owens
Shelli Rossman
Kelly Walsh

RTI International

Kelle Barrick
Erin Kennedy
Lara Markovits

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This project was supported by Award No. 2012-R2-CX-0032 awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.





URBAN INSTITUTE
Justice Policy Center

2100 M Street NW
Washington, DC 20037
www.urban.org

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Evaluability Assessment of the FY 2011 Bureau of Justice Assistance Second Chance Act Adult Offender Reentry Demonstration Projects

Executive Summary

Introduction

Prisoner reentry remains a pressing national and local policy issue. In 2008, more than 735,000 prisoners were released from state and federal prisons across the country (West, Sabol, and Cooper 2009), and another 10 to 12 million cycle through the nation's jails each year (Beck 2006). Chances of successful reentry are low: close to 68 percent of prisoners are re-arrested within three years of release (Langan and Levin 2002). Numerous factors contribute to these high recidivism rates. In 2008, the Second Chance Act (SCA): Community Safety Through Recidivism Prevention was signed into law with the goal of increasing reentry programming for offenders released from state prisons and local jails, and improving reentry outcomes for both the criminal justice system and the individuals it serves. Since 2009, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) has awarded dozens of SCA adult offender demonstration grants to communities across the nation. The goals of the SCA projects are to measurably (1) increase reentry programming for returning prisoners and their families, (2) reduce recidivism and criminal involvement among program participants by 50 percent over five years, (3) reduce violations among program participants, and (4) improve reintegration outcomes, including reducing substance abuse and increasing employment and housing stability.

In the summer of 2012, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) commissioned a four-month¹, intensive evaluability assessment (EA) of eight FY 2011 SCA adult offender reentry demonstration sites selected by BJA for further study. EA is crucial in determining if a project is a candidate for meaningful evaluation (Wholey, Hatry, and Newcomer 2004). At a minimum, an evaluable program must have well-defined program goals, target populations, and eligibility criteria, as well as reliable and accessible performance data, and a defensible counterfactual (Barnow and The Lewin Group 1997). Given NIJ's interest in some level of evaluation in *all* eight adult SCA sites, EA data collection was designed to support more nuanced evaluation recommendations than "Evaluate: Yes or No." Specifically, the EA aimed to answer two questions: is the program evaluable and if so, how, and at what level of effort. Design options were expected to address both the recommended level and type of evaluation, including the suggested mix of process, outcome, impact, and cost analyses. In addition to these EA tasks, the solicitation also requested information about site training and technical assistance (TTA) needs that BJA and the Council of State Government's National Reentry Resource Center could use to improve the provision of both. Lastly, the solicitation specified two sets of deliverables: site-specific EA reports and one cross-site final EA report.

The Urban Institute (UI), and its partner RTI International, were selected to conduct the EA following a competitive process. While eight sites were initially targeted for the EA, this number

¹ The project's original performance period spanned January 1, 2013 to April 30, 2013, but was expanded to six months when NIJ requested a November 1, 2012 start date shortly after award. Expansion of the EA to examine two additional sites in March 2013 resulted in further extension of the project to June 30, 2013.

expanded to ten in the spring of 2013:

1. Beaver County (PA) ChancesR: Reentry, Reunification, and Recovery Program;
2. Boston (MA) Reentry Initiative;
3. Hudson County (NJ) Community Reintegration Program;
4. Johnson County (KS) Reentry Project;
5. Minnesota Department of Corrections High Risk Recidivism Reduction Demonstration Project;
6. Missouri Department of Corrections Second Chance in Action Program;
7. New Haven (CT) Reentry Initiative;
8. Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Healthy Environments, Loving Parents Initiative;
9. Palm Beach County (FL) Regional and State Transitional Ex-Offender Reentry Initiative;
10. Solano County (CA) Women's Reentry Achievement Program.

While each program targets adult offenders under state or local custody (and about to return to the community) for comprehensive reentry programming and services designed to promote successful reintegration and reduce recidivism, there is considerable variation among the sites. Three sites focus exclusively on female offenders (Ohio, Missouri, and Solano County). One project targets individuals re-incarcerated for supervision violations (Minnesota) while another focuses on individuals with substance abuse and co-occurring disorders (Beaver County). Half of the sites target prisoners returning from state departments of correction (Connecticut, Florida, Missouri, Minnesota, Ohio), while the rest address local jail transition (Beaver County, Boston, Hudson County, Johnson County; and Solano County). Some programs front-load case management services, while others emphasize community and family supports. The composition and structure of the FY 2011 SCA projects also vary by jurisdiction with agencies outside the criminal justice system leading three of the projects (Boston, Beaver County, and Solano County). These variations in program design and intended client population type underscore the critical importance of the evaluability assessment commissioned by the NIJ.

Methods

The results of the current EA will inform the final design of the forthcoming Evaluation of the FY 2011 BJA SCA Adult Offender Reentry Demonstration Project, which also will be conducted by RTI and UI.² This evaluation entails a research design (subject to revisions based on the Evaluability Assessment of the ten sites selected by BJA and NIJ for further study) that envisions: (1) process/implementation evaluation in each sites; (2) recidivism outcome (treatment group only) or impact evaluation (treatment and comparison groups) based on administrative records (secondary data) of arrest and incarceration; (3) more intensive impact evaluation that collects primary data (three waves of interviews) for both treatment and comparison groups, and, where feasible, uses random assignment to construct treatment and control groups; and (4) two different levels of cost analysis, in which the sites selected for the

² UI and RTI partnered on both the EA work (Focus Area 1 of the evaluation solicitation) and the full evaluation (Focus Area 2), and proposed to use the same teams for both evaluation projects to facilitate critical efficiencies (knowledge, resources, execution, celerity) while building a solid knowledge base of the sites and their capacity for evaluation to the benefit of focus area 2 work.

intensive impact evaluation would also participate in a more intensive cost study, using the primary interview data to generate information about benefits other than recidivism outcomes.

Cognizant of this design, the EA drew on (1) program materials; (2) program case file and administrative records review to determine data quality and generate sample size estimates; (3) direct observation of program operations; (4) analysis of BJA progress reports and aggregate performance data; and (5) semi-structured interviews with policy-level stakeholders and program staff to assess capacity and readiness for evaluation across multiple EA domains and to collect supplemental information on TTA needs. EA data collection activities consisted of

- **Review of program materials and documents**, including program and partner materials such as blank intake and assessment forms, orientation materials, program handbooks, redacted transition case plans, annual reports, and program logic models to document operations.
- **Analysis of BJA aggregate performance data**, including process measures, recidivism outcomes, and other reintegration indicators that may underscore program performance.
- **Pre-visit phone interviews** with SCA coordinators and project directors in each site to outline EA objectives and obtain updated project information. Between November 12 and December 14, 2012, EA researchers conducted 60-minute pre-visit phone interviews with SCA project directors, program coordinators, and grant coordinators in each site to outline EA objectives and obtain updated project information; tentative site visit dates were also identified and interview lists compiled of program staff and partners with whom EA researchers would meet while on site.
- **Site visits including semi-structured interviews** with policy-level stakeholders, program staff, and partners to assess capacity and readiness for evaluation across multiple EA domains, as well as to identify TTA needs. Between January 14, 2013 and February 15, 2013, EA researchers conducted site visits to seven of the eight SCA projects; two more trips were conducted in late April 2013 with the addition of the Beaver County and Palm Beach County sites to the EA.³ Interviews with individual stakeholders at the policy-level tracked the SCA initiative's efforts, evolution, and adaptation during the earlier funding period; the impact of the grant on cross-systems coordination, collaboration, and data exchange; and changes in policies and procedures. Semi-structured interviews with program and partner staff documented screening, assessment, case planning, transition planning, case flow, business-as-usual, and other critical program operations. Additional site visit activities included
 - **Review of program case files and administrative records** to determine data quality, verify the scope and content of client-level data routinely collected, and generate case flow and sample size estimates.
 - **Direct observation of program operations to determine logistics** that may inform subject recruitment and enrollment procedures for the full evaluation.

³ The Johnson County (KS) site declined further participation in the grant program after the EA began. For this reason, the EA study conducted site visits to nine projects and compiled nine site-specific EA reports. A brief memorandum describing the Johnson County program was also compiled.

EA researchers used the information generated from the above activities to (1) document and describe program operations and implementation issues; (2) assess program stability and maturity; (3) gauge compliance with the SCA model; (4) document program logic and case flow; (5) determine the extent to which viable comparison groups could be established; (6) identify extant data sources to support evaluation; and (7) develop evaluation recommendations. Nine site-specific evaluability assessment reports were compiled drawing on data collected from the above activities.⁴ In formulating evaluation recommendations, EA researchers considered not only program maturity, stability, and capacity, but also those dimensions of the program likely to be of interest to the broader field and to yield actionable information. The latter was consistent with NIJ's objective to conduct some level of evaluation in each site.

Findings

Findings from the evaluability assessment, including cross-cutting themes and issues affecting site implementation as well as future evaluation activities, are discussed in the following sections.

Implementation

With the exception of the Ohio and Missouri sites, the SCA programs examined under the EA were fully operational and largely mirrored what had been proposed. Furthermore, operations were stable and well-defined. Adherence to eligibility criteria and program procedures was generally high. The EA sites generally reported few barriers to implementation. Delayed start-up and lower-than-anticipated case flow were the most prevalent obstacles, followed by conflicting or unclear policies pertaining to the use of grant funds specifically, the provision of participant incentives and basic necessities. Staff turnover affected some sites more than others (Ohio and Missouri). In general, the incremental nature of grant funding—sites reportedly had to re-compete for funds annually—added both uncertainty and an administrative burden that affected program implementation and operations, and hampered long-term planning. Despite these challenges, there is a strong commitment to the SCA concept of serving offenders in each of these sites. Several sites evidenced that commitment to the SCA concept through sustainability planning, designed to ensure continuation of reentry operations after the grant concludes in September 2013.

Program Logic and Operations

Each site's program strategy, while different, reflected the key elements of the SCA Prisoner Reentry Initiative Logic Model with respect to its overarching project goals, design, operations, and implementation. Designed to meet the multiple challenges facing former inmates upon their return to the community, all of the SCA programs provided an array of pre- and post-release services, although some programs clearly used the grant to establish or enhance its approach to one component or the other. Risk and needs assessments, transition case planning, case management, and family involvement are key elements of grantees' SCA projects. The sites varied significantly with respect to target population, case flow, eligibility criteria, referral sources and mechanism, and configuration and duration of reentry services. Each site employs a collaborative strategy to address the challenges faced by their respective target populations. Each

⁴ The EA team compiled a brief summary memorandum describing the Johnson County (KS) Reentry Project for NIJ and BJA.

site had a functional collaborative body in place to guide reentry efforts, although composition and history of collaborative partnerships varied.

Data Elements, Sources, Systems, and Strategies

Each SCA site had multiple data systems from which information could be drawn for evaluation purposes, including official records data drawn from criminal justice data systems, and in some sites, new data structures that had been created to satisfy the grant's reporting requirements. Few sites, however, maintained or could supply data on access to and utilization of programs and services for comparison subjects, either pre- or post-release.

Local Evaluation

Seven sites were engaged in some form of local evaluation, relying either on internal resources and expertise or engaging an external contracted evaluator. The nature of these local evaluation efforts ranged from performance monitoring and assistance with data collection and analysis, to process/implementation and outcome analyses featuring contemporaneous comparison groups. Two sites did not have local evaluations.

Potential Comparison Groups

Viable comparison groups could not be readily identified in Beaver County, Ohio, and Solano County. In both Beaver and Solano counties, the SCA programs reportedly serve the vast majority of the population targeted, however, neighboring jurisdictions may serve as viable comparison sites. In Ohio, the nature of the target population (pregnant offenders or those with young children) inhibits identification of a viable comparison group. Strong comparison group options exist in the remaining six sites. Random assignment may be viable in Connecticut and Minnesota, while other factors suggest contemporaneous comparison groups are possible in the remaining sites.

Training and Technical Assistance

Few sites reported accessing TTA under the grant and instead secured TTA independently. When asked about pressing TTA needs, site stakeholders most often requested additional training and technical assistance on the grant's performance measures and reporting requirements. This was coupled with a request that measures be finalized prior to data collection; the changes in reporting requirements created confusion and taxed program resources.

Evaluability Assessment Recommendations

EA findings suggest all nine sites are viable for further evaluation. Five sites—Beaver County, Minnesota, New Haven, Palm Beach County, and Solano County—have sufficient case flow to support a rigorous *impact* evaluation. Six of the nine sites are viable candidates for *process and implementation evaluation*, as well as *recidivism outcome analysis* (draws on administrative records only), and *cost analysis*. Due to a number of factors, the Healthy Environments, Loving Parents (HELP II) Initiative is recommended for *implementation/process evaluation* or *case study* only. Evaluation across these nine sites would likely yield useful insights for criminal justice practitioners and policymakers. Site-specific EA recommendations and evaluation considerations are outlined in Exhibit A.

Exhibit A. SCA EA Evaluation Considerations and Recommendations

Site	Pros	Cons	Level/type of Evaluation Recommended
<p>ChancesR Reentry Program Beaver County (PA) Behavioral Health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Steady case flow * Established cross-systems approach with high level of commitment and buy-in across leadership and staff; strategic use of blended funding streams * Well-developed continuum of care for co-occurring treatment that spans jail and the community * Data to support evaluation and cost analysis * Clear, consistent coordination and communication across all key partners and staff * History of collaboration * Use of Evidence-based Practice (EBPs) * Use of Global Appraisal of Individual Need Short Screener (GAIN SS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Screening and assessment limited to behavior health (no screening/assessment for risk of re-offending/criminogenic need) — GAIN SS limited to program clients (no universal procedure) * Blended funding streams blurs program lines * Completion definition may not reflect practice * Limited comparison group options * If funding interrupted some aspects of the program are likely to be affected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Process/ implementation * Recidivism outcome * Cost study 1 * Viable impact site * Other outcomes * Cost study 2
<p>Boston Reentry Initiative Boston (MA) Police Department</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Long standing program integrated into Suffolk County House of Correction/ Boston Police Department * Steady case flow * Recognized as model program * Extensive on-going evaluation (by Anthony Braga) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Selection process and eligibility criteria includes subjectivity * Post-release component largely consists of support and advocacy by case managers (CMs) and employment assistance * Boston Reentry Initiative CMs may begin to serve DOC offenders released due to evidence tampering at state drug lab; uncertain if/how this will impact program, but the hiring of additional CMs to serve this population has been approved by BJA * Extensive on-going evaluation (by Anthony Braga) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Process/ implementation * Recidivism outcome * Cost study 1
<p>Community Reintegration Program Hudson County (NJ) Department of Corrections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * High level of commitment and buy-in from all staff levels * Strong support for evaluation * Data to support evaluation and cost analysis (leadership supportive of both); * Clear, consistent coordination and communication across all key partners and staff * Strong history of working together * Use of COMPAS on all admitted to Hudson County Department of Correction allows for potential matching for comparison groups; acquired COMPAS classification database to link risk and custody information * Community Reintegration Program (CRP) client population is not transient, for the most part, allowing for tracking over time * Therapeutic Community (TC) is an EBP for substance-abusing inmates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Three different target population subgroups * If funding interrupted some aspects of the program are likely to be affected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Process/ implementation * Recidivism outcome * Cost study 1 * Supportive housing with electronic monitoring (EM) * TC for male and female offenders in jail

Site	Pros	Cons	Level/Type of Evaluation Recommended
<p>MNDOC High Risk Recidivism Reduction Demonstration Project Minnesota Department of Corrections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Strong support for evaluation * Random assignment * Service data (unit level) for treatment group * MN Department of Corrections (DOC) conducted basic cost analysis of FY 2010 services * Unique population targeted (high-risk Release Violators - RVs) * LSI-R scores used for transition planning/goal setting * Strong commitment and collaboration (MN DOC and key community-based partners) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Pre-release component currently doesn't include services (e.g., educational, vocational, mental health and substance abuse treatment) * Recent key partner staff turnover * Eligibility criteria may need to be modified eventually to ensure continued level of case flow * If funding interrupted some aspects of the program are likely to be affected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Process/ implementation * Recidivism outcome * Cost study 1 * Viable impact site * Other outcomes * Cost study 2 * Unique population targeted (high-risk RVs) * Colocation of services post-release
<p>Second Chance In Action Program Missouri Department of Corrections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Institutional Risk Reduction Assessment (IRRA) and Gender Responsive Assessment (GRA), and other assessments system-wide; allows for propensity score matching; other reentry practices well-established as business-as-usual * Video conferencing component as mechanism to address relational issues/increase post-release stability is innovative and well-implemented * Tackles unique issue of reentry in rural, isolated areas * Administrative data * Good capacity to support external evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Role confusion * Current operations vary from what was proposed (no phases, limited use of incentives due to policy barriers) * Policy/procedures change frequently * Staff turnover/instability * Uncertainty as to what will be sustained * If funding interrupted some aspects of the program are likely to be affected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Process/ implementation * Recidivism outcome * Cost study 1 * Video conferencing component as mechanism to address relational issues/increase post-release stability * Services to rural female offenders
<p>New Haven Reentry Initiative Connecticut Department of Corrections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Steady case flow * Treatment and Programs Assessment Instrument (TPAI), Offender Accountability Plan (OAP) system-wide; supports matching * Administrative and program data * Solid collaborative structures at all levels of operations; broad support from leaders and line staff * Clear roles/responsibilities * Strong support for evaluation including random assignment * Several unique features for study (furlough, PO/CM partnership, community advocates) * Broad adherence to eligibility criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Pre-release component largely focused on employment readiness * Eligibility requirements have expanded in Year 2 to include HIGHEST risk (8s, previously took only 4-7s) on the TPAI; the program takes sex offenders but determined on a case-by-case basis; some segregation inmates are also eligible * If funding interrupted some aspects of the program are likely to be affected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Process/ implementation * Recidivism outcome * Cost study 1 * Viable impact site * Other outcomes * Cost study 2 * Furlough component would be of interest to broader field and could be tested

<p>Healthy Environment, Loving Parents Ohio Department of Rehabilitation Correction and (ODRC)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Administered by ODRC which is reentry focused * Added additional housing partners because participants did not want structured environment * Made program modifications with components that were not working as intended (e.g., replaced Goodwill with Alvis House) * Unique population targeted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Low case flow * Staff and partner changes * Eligibility criteria modified * Limited communication from ODRC to partners/across partners * No structured post-release component(s) * If funding interrupted some aspects of the program are likely to be affected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Case study only * Unique population (female offenders with young children)
<p>RESTORE Reentry Program Palm Beach County (FL) Criminal Justice Commission</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Clearly defined and stable program components * Sufficient and steady case flow * Stakeholders' invested in providing reentry services to offenders returning to the county * Advanced in-house data system tracks client service receipt and outcomes * Palm Beach County's Criminal Justice Commission's interested in program evaluation 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Process/ implementation * Recidivism outcome * Cost study 1 * Viable impact site * Other outcomes * Cost study 2
<p>Women's Reentry Achievement Program Solano County (CA) Department of Human and Social Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * High commitment from local leaders * Use of EBPs; cross-training on core approaches * Case flow reportedly improving * Strong CM component pre-post release (Youth and Family Services - YFS) * Jail data easy to extract * Criminal justice system data integrated/easy to link 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Low case flow * Assessment (Women's Risk and Need Assessment -WRNA) limited to Women's Reentry Achievement Program clients - limits matching potential; LS/CMI just being implemented more broadly; may be able to approx. risk with jail data * Program data (units of service recorded by partners but hard to distinguish) * Pre-release service provision impacted by realignment * Completion and graduation criteria loosely defined, but working to strengthen * Comparison group options * If funding interrupted some aspects of the program are likely to be affected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Process/ implementation * Recidivism outcome * Cost study 1 * Viable impact site * Other outcomes * Cost study 2 * Unique population targeted (female offenders)

Summary

The EA team found that each of the nine sites could support some level of evaluation. Five sites are strong candidates for impact evaluation: program operations are stable and well-defined, and boast both sufficient data sources to support evaluation and potential comparison groups. Three are appropriate for process/implementation, recidivism outcome analysis and cost analyses, and one site would be best suited for a case study.

The EA examined programs as they currently exist. Several sites, however, had plans to cease program recruitment and enrollment in the spring of 2013⁵ due to uncertainty about future funding. End-date uncertainties could lead to modification of the content and/or delivery of the

⁵ This would ensure that the last cases enrolled would be released and able to access the full complement of post-release services prior to the grant's conclusion in September 2013.

programs, altering the number and types of clients who are served (and thus the program's evaluability). Many sites were, understandably, engaged in sustainability planning and contemplating changes to the structure or scope of programming. These factors beg the question what may remain to be evaluated by September 2013 and relatedly, what researchers would be evaluating. To ensure that sites remain viable for evaluation, supplemental funding should be provided in short order and at a level that permits programs to operate at full capacity (i.e., without interrupting case recruitment, enrollment, and services) as evaluation in each site is likely to yield actionable information and advance reentry practice.

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