

## Demonstration Field Experiments

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Like other federal research agencies, NIJ has built, implemented and managed numerous demonstration/evaluation programs. NIJ's earliest efforts in demonstration programs began in the 1970s with the Managing Criminal Investigations program. NIJ's research portfolio continues to make frequent use of demonstration programs. Recent efforts have included Children at Risk, Breaking the (Drug-Crime) Cycle, Judicial Oversight Demonstration, and Officer and Family Stress Management.

The newest of these programs combine multisite demonstration of a program with rigorous experimental evaluation in an applied setting: ***Demonstration Field Experiments***.

**What are the key elements of demonstration field experiments?** The hallmarks of these programs are (1) they are designed to generate evidence; (2) there is an existing program model with some accumulated evidence of effectiveness, often from a single pilot site; (3) the selection of multiple program site participation is based on sites' ability and willingness to implement and adhere to the model and to the evaluation design; (4) there is intensive monitoring (biweekly conference calls) of implementation supplemented by training and technical assistance as needed; (5) there are frequent site visits to verify implementation and overall progress in the experiment; and (6) there is a rigorous evaluation of the program across all sites. This disciplined approach provides an assessment of the program's effectiveness as well as an understanding of differences in outcomes due to local conditions.

**How important is "program fidelity?"** Often, program sites are allowed to use program resources to implement a range of variations of a basic program. While there are some unavoidable local differences in laws, resources and criminal justice infrastructure, NIJ's demonstration field experiment program works to ensure program fidelity – the implementation of all critical program elements – while allowing local conditions to dictate the rules of governance. Since the specific purpose of funding the multisite implementation is to learn whether the program works, adherence to the model – and to the experimental design – is given a very high priority. And lessons learned about local obstacles become a body of innovative practices that can be shared with other jurisdictions.

**What drives the cost of a demonstration field experiment?** There is no formula for costing a multisite demonstration/evaluation. The program should cover costs such as equipment and staff that sites would not otherwise require. The budget should include provisions for training and technical assistance, plus regular cross-site "cluster" meetings so sites can share experiences and learn from each other. Budget provisions for local research (to aid implementation) and cross-site evaluation (to demonstrate results) are essential to the goal of a demonstration program. The research and evaluation costs are often equivalent to adding an additional site. For example, NIJ's DNA Property Crimes Field Experiment (a relatively simple intervention) comprised five sites with direct costs

ranging up to \$500,000. The evaluation costs were \$600,000, and an additional \$300,000 was budgeted for training, technical assistance and cluster meetings.

**What do these programs focus on?** Demonstration field experiments can focus on any type of intervention: court-related, probation-focused, interventions targeting violent gangs or gun crimes, domestic violence, or any other aspect of crime or the justice system.

Examples of specific demonstration field experiments that NIJ could conduct include:

- A multisite field test of a promising prisoner reentry program, intervention or policy.
- A multisite field test of specific strategies to prevent youth violence.
- A multisite field test of fatherhood and family-strengthening programs targeting domestic violence batterers.
- A multisite replication of a court-based intervention that has proven successful in a single site.