



U.S. Department of Justice

Office of Justice Programs

National Institute of Justice

Washington, D.C. 20531

December 4, 2014

Dear Colleague:

This letter alerts all social and behavioral science researchers to the National Institute of Justice's (NIJ's) interest in receiving proposals related to corrections that can strengthen our knowledge base and enhance criminal justice practices. NIJ has been building its corrections research portfolio for many years and will continue to do so in its pursuit of improving the administration of justice nationwide.

NIJ's corrections research portfolio includes institutional and community corrections, offender reentry programs, employment, and homelessness and housing-related issues for ex-offenders. As offender reentry has gained prominence in the research and practitioner communities, NIJ's research portfolio has reflected this shift. NIJ has moved this issue to the forefront for policy makers and practitioners and will continue to support innovative research.

In its efforts to prevent and reduce crime and violence, NIJ's Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) strives to address the questions raised by corrections practitioners and academics and to stay abreast of the latest developments related to corrections. For Fiscal Year 2015, ORE is interested in taking a broader view of corrections and is open to a wide range of corrections and corrections-related research in a diverse set of topical areas, including but not limited to the following:

- **Alternatives to incarceration.** (A) According to the recently released report by the National Academy of Sciences, *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences*, one key factor in the increase in incarceration rates is changes in sentencing policies, specifically, drug laws, longer sentences and mandatory minimums. Inmates are staying in prison for longer periods of time, even though the deterrent effects are negligible. What are the social and political consequences of sentencing laws? What are cost-effective alternatives to incarceration (ATIs)? (B) The promotion of ATIs for serious offenders through federal and state legislation raises potential concerns for local criminal justice system programs and policies. For example, what are the consequences for diversion and other case-management options, or problem solving courts and other specialized tracks? How do programs respond to penal code and policy changes that divert more serious offenders to ATIs and reduce incarceration sentences and terms? Are offenders more or less motivated to enter and complete programs if the presumed sentence reserved as a legal sanction for noncompliance is reduced for moderate-risk offenders? As programs accommodate a changing offender population (through eligibility and assessment, therapy and monitoring, etc.), there is greater potential for substantive reduction in recidivism, so raising criminal risk standards to admit more serious offenders may increase program cost-effectiveness. However,

graduation rates and other program performance measures may decline as high-risk offenders are added to active caseloads of moderate-risk offenders.

- **Correctional officer safety and wellness.** Findings from studies on police officer safety and wellness suggest that stress (job and personal); mental health and substance abuse issues; poor physical health; exposure to critical incidents; issues within an organization; shift work and sleep deprivation' and other factors contribute to how officers cope on the job. Do these findings translate to correctional officers? If so, how? Are there important differences in assessing safety and wellness for correctional officers than for other law enforcement officers? What interventions or programs would improve officer safety and wellness in a custody setting?
- **Effects of the prison experience on reentry.** The experience of incarceration has been linked to a number of outcomes occurring post-release, such as the difficulty of reentering one's community, finding employment, and reuniting with one's family, as well as high rates of recidivism. However, the experience itself has yet to be examined in its entirety. Many studies have examined, for example, time spent in administrative segregation or exposure to institutional violence on post-release coping capability. However, these studies have not accounted for the intersection of these and other facility characteristics on reentry. Does the intersection of varying facility characteristics impact offender reentry? If so, how?
- **Offender employment and redemption.** Job seekers with a criminal record face increased difficulty in finding employment. A key area of continued inquiry is whether and for how long a criminal past matters. For example, do employers recognize that "redemption" can occur—that the risk of hiring someone with a criminal record many years old is similar to the risk of hiring someone who has no criminal record? Is there evidence that employers discriminate against those with stale criminal records? If so, what are the short- and long-term implications for offender reentry, employment, wellness and other outcomes?

Other topics of research on corrections are of continued interest to NIJ under this solicitation cycle, especially research involving randomization of interventions or programs of interest, diversion programs, and probation and parole. NIJ is interested in building sound, evidence-based knowledge of interventions/programs that work and that can be tested in a variety of organizations under varied circumstances, as are corrections organizations across the country.

Search past awards for examples of related current and completed projects on NIJ.gov, keywords "past awards."

Interested prospective applicants are highly encouraged to consult with relevant project officers prior to submitting a proposal. Applicants interested in research on general corrections issues should contact Dr. Marie Garcia at Marie.Garcia@usdoj.gov. Applicants interested in employment and redemption should contact Ms. Marilyn Moses at Marilyn.Moses@usdoj.gov.

This is not a special competition or a new program. Proposals in response to this Dear Colleague Letter must meet the requirements and deadlines of the solicitation for which they are submitted.

The appropriate vehicle for responding to topics covered in this letter will be NIJ's "Research and Evaluation on Justice Systems" Solicitation. To receive an e-mail when NIJ issues a solicitation, subscribe to NIJ.gov. You also can follow us on Twitter (twitter.com/OJPNIJ) and Facebook (facebook.com/OJPNIJ).

The "Research and Evaluation on Justice Systems" solicitation should be available on the NIJ website in early 2015.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Sabol".

William J. Sabol, Ph.D.
Acting Director
National Institute of Justice