



# BJA Bureau of Justice Assistance Fact Sheet

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## Correctional Options Grant Program

### Background

Between 1980 and 1994 the number of men and women incarcerated in the United States nearly tripled. By the end of 1994, the U.S. prison population had reached an all-time high of 1,053,738. During that year, the 50 States and the District of Columbia took in an additional 77,847 prisoners, and the Federal system housed an additional 5,447. The national jail population has also increased to more than 490,400 prisoners. As a result of this dramatic increase in prison and jail populations, the costs of State and local correctional facilities and services have increased dramatically.

Despite the construction of new facilities, many correctional systems are operating far beyond their intended capacity. And, as the correctional population has increased, there has been a corresponding decrease in inmate program opportunities, such as substance abuse treatment, basic and remedial education, vocational education and training, work release, postrelease job training, and transitional services. Furthermore, the recidivism rate for inmates leaving prisons and jails is unacceptably high.

Historically, probation has offered the only alternative sanction to incarceration. However, during the past few years, some jurisdictions have been experimenting with a variety of correctional options that fall between probation and incarceration. These options offer a larger selection of appropriate punishment, particularly for first-time offenders and juveniles, that not only help to control the cost of corrections but also offer youthful and nonviolent offenders the skills necessary to successfully reintegrate into the community.

### The Program

In 1990, in response to the pervasive problem of prison and jail crowding and the high recidivism rate among offenders who serve time in traditional correctional institutions, Congress authorized the Correctional Options Grant Program. The purpose of the program is to demonstrate the development and implementation of cost-effective correctional options that reduce reliance on incarceration within existing correctional systems and provide treatment and services to assist youthful offenders in pursuing a course of lawful and productive conduct. As program administrator, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) of the U.S. Department of Justice was granted authority to establish a comprehensive program of financial and technical assistance to support the development of cost-effective alternatives to traditional incarceration.

The range of existing correctional options is highly diverse; it includes community-based incarceration, weekend sentences, electronic monitoring, intensive probation, boot camps, and other innovative sanctions designed to have the greatest impact on offenders who can be penalized and dealt with more effectively in an environment other than a traditional correctional facility.

The Correctional Options Grant Program covers three types of grants:

**Part I grants:** to support public agencies by encouraging the development and implementation of correctional

options *within existing State and local correctional systems*. These State and local programs:

- ❑ Provide more appropriate intervention for youthful offenders who are not career criminals, but who, without intervention, are likely to become career criminals or serious offenders.
- ❑ Provide the degree of security and discipline appropriate for the offender involved.
- ❑ Provide diagnosis, treatment, and services that will enable the offender to pursue a course of lawful and productive conduct after release from legal restraint.
- ❑ Reduce criminal recidivism by offenders who receive punishment through such alternatives, thereby reducing the cost of correctional services and facilities.

**Part II grants:** to support *private nonprofit organizations* that:

- ❑ Disseminate information about effective correctional options programs to interested jurisdictions.
- ❑ Develop innovative projects to be carried out in connection with a correctional option.
- ❑ Train and educate criminal justice personnel.
- ❑ Provide technical assistance to State and local governments.

**Part III grants:** to support public agencies by providing support for the development and testing of *correctional boot camps* for youthful offenders. These State and local programs:

- ❑ Emphasize and provide discipline, treatment, and work.
- ❑ Include activities and resources to educate offenders about substance abuse.
- ❑ Encourage participants to become productive, law-abiding citizens.

## Technical Assistance and Evaluation

Correctional Options Grant Program grantees are supported by a network of technical assistance service providers—including Criminal Justice Associates, National

Treatment Alternatives for Safer Communities (TASC), the Sentencing Project, the International Association of Residential Community Alternatives, the American Correctional Association, and the American Probation and Parole Association. The no-fee technical assistance provided to a grantee, usually given onsite, ranges from a consultant's personal knowledge of a related problem in other demonstration programs or similar settings to extensive data-collection and problem analysis, resulting in a set of recommendations for improvement.

Through an interagency agreement with BJA, the National Institute of Justice, the criminal justice research component of the Department of Justice, evaluates projects funded through the Correctional Options Grant Program. Through this interagency agreement, a comprehensive, long-term evaluation of the Correctional Options Grant Program is being conducted by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency.

## For Further Information

To learn more about the Correctional Options Grant Program, contact:

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