

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

**Document Title: The National Institute of Justice's Evaluation of
Second Chance Act Adult Reentry Courts:
Program Characteristics and Preliminary
Themes from Year 1**

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Document No.: 241400

Date Received: March 2013

Award Number: 2010-RY-BX-0001

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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decade ago, they have not been implemented nor studied as extensively as drug courts and other problem-solving courts. As a result, little is known about the challenges associated with reentry court implementation and the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of these programs. Furthermore, a well-established reentry court model has not been clearly documented.

Several federal efforts have supported the creation of reentry courts. In February 2000, the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) launched the Reentry Court Initiative (RCI) with the goal of establishing “a seamless system of offender accountability and support services throughout the reentry process.” The RCI provided limited technical assistance (but no direct financial support) to nine states to develop reentry court programs. The sites were “charged with developing strategies to improve the tracking and supervision of offenders upon release, prepare communities to address public safety concerns, and provide the services necessary to help offenders reconnect with their families and the community” (OJP, 1999). Sites were encouraged to tailor their reentry court programs to their local jurisdictional context, while incorporating six core elements: assessment and planning, active oversight, management of support services, accountability to community, graduated and parsimonious sanctions, and rewards for success (Lindquist, Hardison, & Lattimore, 2004). The process evaluation of the RCI found that all but one site became operational. However, the programs operated on a very small scale and encountered several implementation barriers (Lindquist et al., 2004). A few of the reentry courts piloted under the RCI sustained their programs, and lessons learned from this early initiative helped pave the way for subsequent reentry courts.

The Second Chance Act of 2007 (SCA) (Pub. L. 110-199) authorized funding for various approaches to adult and juvenile reentry, one of which was the reentry court model. Several reentry courts were awarded funding under the Bureau of Justice Assistance’s (BJA’s) FY 2010 State, Tribal, and Local Reentry Courts Program and BJA’s FY2009 solicitation for SCA Adult Demonstration Projects. The framework for establishing a reentry court under the SCA was based on lessons learned from the earlier RCI and from other early reentry courts. An emphasis on the use of validated assessment tools, evidence-based treatment practices, and rigorous tracking of services delivered and received distinguished the new BJA requirements. As with all SCA funding, grantees are subject to several mandatory requirements, including reentry strategic planning, the use of a Reentry Task Force, and other strategies for interagency collaboration. Technical assistance is provided to SCA grantees by the National Reentry Resource Center, which is overseen by the Council of State Governments (CSG).

A cross-site evaluation of eight BJA-funded reentry courts was awarded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) in FY2010. NIJ’s Evaluation of Second Chance Act Adult Reentry Courts (NESCAARC) is being

conducted by NPC Research (NPC), RTI International (RTI), and the Center for Court Innovation (CCI). The evaluation consists of three components—a process evaluation, impact evaluation, and cost-effectiveness study (see sidebar). The goals of the evaluation are to:

1. Describe the SCA adult reentry courts through a process evaluation. Process evaluation methods include interviews with reentry court staff, observations of staff meetings and court sessions and focus groups with reentry court participants.
2. Determine the effectiveness of the SCA reentry courts at reducing recidivism and improving

The NESCAARC Evaluation

- The **process evaluation** will document the policies, practices, community context, and implementation barriers across all eight sites; draw explicit comparisons between the reentry court model, as implemented in the sites, with the antecedent drug court model (specifying similarities, differences, and adaptations in each policy domain); and examine reentry courts in the context of reentry programs and best practices.
- The **impact evaluation** will compare during- and post-program recidivism outcomes and other individual level outcomes (e.g., employment, substance use, and housing) of reentry court program participants to a matched comparison group to determine if reentry courts reduce re-arrests, reconvictions, and re-incarceration and if reentry courts reduce problems related to criminal behavior, drug and alcohol abuse, employment, housing, mental health, and family relationships. The impact evaluation will also seek to determine which specific reentry court practices, services, and participant perceptions are associated with more positive outcomes.
- The **cost-effectiveness analysis** that will be conducted in seven sites will estimate the cost of the program and determine whether the costs due to criminal justice, treatment, and other outcomes are lower for reentry court participants than their matched comparison groups.

individual outcomes through an impact evaluation.

In seven sites, the impact evaluation involves obtaining administrative data on participants (with samples that are cumulative from program startup) and comparison offenders. In four sites, the impact evaluation will also include data from interviews and oral fluids drug tests of participants and comparison offenders.

3. Conduct a cost-benefit analysis. The cost-benefit study will use the transaction and institutional cost analysis (TICA) approach. The TICA approach views an individual's interaction with publicly funded agencies as a set of *transactions* in which the individual utilizes resources contributed from multiple agencies and institutions. This cost analysis involves calculating the costs of the reentry court programs, and the costs of outcomes (or impacts) after program entry (or the equivalent for the comparison group).

4. Identify key reentry court components. The detailed information gathered from the process evaluation, as well as information learned from the administrative data and cost analysis will be used to help identify any key reentry court components that occur in these eight sites.

