

2016

## Annual Report 2016

Nebraska Center for Justice Research, University of Nebraska at Omaha

Ryan E. Spohn

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# Nebraska Center for Justice Research

## Annual Report 2016



UNIVERSITY OF  
**Nebraska**  
Omaha





## FROM THE DIRECTOR:

Ryan E. Spohn

The Nebraska Center for Justice Research (NCJR) was established in 2014 with a mission to develop and sustain criminal justice research capacity internal to the State of Nebraska. Our goal is to assist the Legislature, justice agencies, practitioners, foundations, and stakeholders with research and evaluation to reduce recidivism, promote the use of evidence-based practices, and improve public safety. This annual report summarizes the activities and financial status of NCJR in its second year.

Our research products built upon the reports we produced last year. For example, we crafted our Adult Justice in Nebraska report to provide a foundation of data trends in areas such as law enforcement and corrections for the Legislature at the beginning of the legislative session. We also produced a follow-up report to track trends in marijuana arrests, jailings, and costs based on our first full year of Nebraska data subsequent to Colorado's legalization of recreational marijuana. Our most important project this year was our contract to develop new classification and re-classification tools for all inmates in our state correctional system. This work is summarized in the report, Development and Validation of the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services Prison Classification System.

NCJR faculty and staff also produced numerous reports from our current contracts and grants, such as our evaluation of Youth Impact! Project, which promotes best outcomes for cross-over youth involved in both the juvenile justice and child welfare systems and our evaluation of the Operation Youth Success collective impact initiative aimed at improving the functioning and outcomes of the Douglas County juvenile justice system. We also produced reports from our research partnership with Project Safe Neighborhoods and the City of

Omaha, an initiative targeted at removing violent gun offenders from our streets. Finally, in collaboration with UNO's Juvenile Justice Institute, we are finalizing the next statewide 3-year strategic plan for the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant funds. Details on our projects can be found in the pages of this report. In regards to our academic mission, our work resulted in many presentations at local and national conferences, multiple academic publications, and our research on marijuana enforcement even ended up highlighted in the London School of Economics' American Politics and Policy Blog.

From a budgetary standpoint, we are encouraged by the well-balanced budgetary profile of NCJR that includes state funding, contracts with local agencies, federal grants, and funding by local foundations. The diversity of our funding profile not only broadens the impact of our research, training, technical assistance, and evaluation activities across the state, but also allows us to provide "matching" funding for products that benefit from both public and private dollars. Our overall budget increased by 50% over our total budget last year. We are also happy to announce that Dr. Emily Wright, associate professor in UNO's School of Criminology and Criminal Justice was hired as Associate Director to add additional faculty expertise to our Center.

In summary, we see NCJR's second year as a continued period of exceptional growth and substantial output of research and evaluation products. In addition, we continue to build research partnerships, collaborations, and relationships with agency and community stakeholders. We look forward to learning from these experiences and increasing our capacity to serve the Nebraska community in subsequent years.





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# THE NEBRASKA CENTER FOR JUSTICE RESEARCH

## Mission Statement

The Nebraska Center for Justice Research’s mission is “to develop and sustain research capacity internal to the State of Nebraska, assist the Legislature in research, evaluation, and policymaking to reduce recidivism, promote the use of evidence-based practices in corrections, and improve public safety.” Our research focus is to use data, research, and evaluation to reduce recidivism, promote the use of evidence-based practices, and improve public safety in Nebraska with an emphasis on reducing prison overcrowding.

## NCJR Facilities

NCJR currently occupies approximately 1,000 square feet in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice (SCCJ), located in the College of Public Affairs and Community Service (CPACS) building on the University of Nebraska Omaha campus.

## Statement of Goals

The Nebraska Center for Justice Research is comprised of a dedicated team of social science researchers who strive to serve the people of Nebraska as well as the University community. In pursuit of this overarching goal, we:

- 1) Conduct rigorous, objective examinations of justice-related issues facing the Nebraska community
- 2) Educate the public and provide assistance to the legislature regarding justice-related issues
- 3) Contribute to the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice’s graduate program by funding students to assist with applied research projects
- 4) Increase state funding to allow capacity to administer and evaluate future justice reinvestment activities
- 5) Increase research visibility through technical reports and academic publications
- 6) Increase our national reputation as a research and evaluation resource



### Ryan Spohn, PhD (Director)

Ryan is the Director of the Nebraska Center for Justice Research. He received his B.S. in Sociology/ Criminology from Kansas State University (1996), M.S. in Sociology from Texas A&M University (1998), and Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Iowa (2003). His areas of research include juvenile delinquency, crime, families, child maltreatment, and the evaluation of criminal justice agencies and programs.



### Laura Schoenrock, MPA (Program Coordinator)

Laura has been a Program Coordinator since April 2012. Laura is a graduate of the UNO Masters in Public Administration Program and holds a B.A. degree in Organizational Communication studies from the University of Northern Iowa. She is currently coordinating the development of a transitional program for imprisoned individuals in the state of Nebraska.



### Johanna Peterson, MA (Research Coordinator)

Johanna is a Research Coordinator at the Nebraska Center for Justice Research. Johanna received her B.S. in Criminology and Criminal Justice from the University of Nebraska Lincoln (2012) and her M.A. in Criminology and Criminal Justice from the University of Nebraska Omaha (2014). She helps to coordinate data collection, develops research design strategies, and produces evaluation reports for the Vocational and Life Skills reentry programs across Nebraska.



### Jennifer Miller, PhD (Research Coordinator)

Jennifer is a Research Coordinator at the Nebraska Center for Justice Research. She received her B.S. in Criminal Justice from the University of Nebraska (2004), M.A. in Political Science from the University of Nebraska (2008), and PhD in Political Science from the University of Arizona (2014).



### Jordan Clark, (Data Coordinator)

Jordan is a Data Coordinator at the Nebraska Center for Justice Research. Jordan received her B.S. in Criminology and Criminal Justice from the University of Nebraska Lincoln (2012). She assists with data collection as well as database design and management, and provides technical support for the Vocational and Life Skills reentry programs across Nebraska.



### Jared Ellison, MS (Graduate Assistant)

Jared is a PhD Candidate in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice and the graduate student assigned to the Nebraska Center for Justice Research. He received his B.S. in Criminology and Criminal Justice from Niagara University (2009) and his M.S. in Criminal Justice Administration from Niagara University (2010). His research interests include short-term incarceration, corrections, and court processing.



### Cheryl Christiansen (Staff Associate)

Cheryl is a staff associate at the Nebraska Center for Justice Research. She tracks the Center’s budgets and supports the directors and coordinators with their various administrative needs. Cheryl has worked for the University of Nebraska Omaha in the Biology department, as well as the dean’s office in the College of Information Sciences & Technology, starting there in 2008.



### Annette O’Dell (Office Associate)

Annette is an office associate at the Nebraska Center for Justice Research. Her primary role is to support the various program activities associated with the Transformation Project including the development and maintenance of its data management system. Annette has worked for the University of Nebraska Omaha since 2015.

Ellison, J. M., & Spohn, R. E. (In Press). Borders up in smoke: Marijuana enforcement in Nebraska after Colorado’s legalization of medical marijuana. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*.

Spohn, R. E., Wright, E. M., & Peterson, J. (In Press). Rape and mental health outcomes among women: Examining the moderating effects of ‘healthy’ fear levels. *Violence Against Women*.

Radatz, D. L., & Wright, E. M. (2016). Integrating the principles of effective intervention into batterer intervention programming: The case for moving toward more evidence-based programming. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 17: 72-87.

Wright, E. M., Pinchevsky, G. M., Benson, M. L., & Radatz, D. L. (2015). Intimate partner violence and subsequent depression: Examining the roles of neighborhood supportive mechanisms. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 56, 342-356.

Spohn, R. E., & Wood, S. D. (2014). Spare the rod, endanger the child? Strain, race/ethnicity, and serious delinquency. *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice*, 12(3), 159-193.

Zavala, E., & Spohn, R. E. (2013). The role of vicarious and anticipated strain on the overlap of violent perpetration and victimization: A test of general strain theory. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 38(1), 119-140.

Spohn, R. E. (2012). Delinquent friends and reactions to strain: An examination of direct and indirect pathways. *Western Criminology Review*, 13, 16-36.

Publications Under Review

Spohn, R. E., & Bjornson, A. (2016). Factors associated with perceptions of rape events and reporting of rape events among college and non-college women. Under review at the *Journal of Crime and Justice*.

Ellison, J. M., & Steiner, B. (2016). Assessing the consequences of police use of force among jail inmates. Re-vise and Resubmit at *Public Administration Review*.

Ellison, J. M., Steiner, B., & Wright, E. M. (2016). Examining the sources of violent victimization among jail inmates. Under review at *Justice Quarterly*.

2016-18

A Collaborative Evaluation of the Nebraska Connected Youth Initiative (with WestEd Justice and Prevention Resource Center). The Nebraska Children & Families Foundation.

2015-17

Project Safe Neighborhoods, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Research partner with City of Omaha.

2014-16

Evaluation of the Douglas County Crossover Youth Practice Model. (with Emily Wright). The Sherwood Foundation.

2014-16

Project Safe Neighborhoods, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Research partner with City of Omaha.

2013-15

Project Safe Neighborhoods, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Research partner with City of Omaha.

2012-14

Project Safe Neighborhoods, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Research partner with City of Omaha.

# CONTRACTS AND PROJECTS

## Principle Investigator

2016	Completely KIDS Evaluation. Completely KIDS.
2016-18	Juvenile Justice Alternatives to Detention Evaluation. Douglas County/The Sherwood Foundation.
2015-16	Justice Assistance Grant: Strategic Plan 2015. Nebraska Crime Commission.
2015-16	Douglas County Collective Impact Initiative. The Sherwood Foundation.
2015	Parole Validation Study. Nebraska Department of Correctional Services.
2012	Transformation Project inmate transition program. Private donor via University of Nebraska Foundation.
2014	Justice Assistance Grant: Performance Measure Development. Nebraska Crime Commission.
2014	Nebraska Coalition of Juvenile Justice: Strengths-Based Assessment. Nebraska Crime Commission.
2013-14	Completely KIDS: Evaluation of Liberty Elementary Programs.
2013	Violence Against Women Act: Strategic Planning. Nebraska Crime Commission.
2013	Justice Assistance Grant: Strategic Planning. Nebraska Crime Commission.
2013	Evaluation of Programs Funded by Nebraska’s Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Funds.
2012	Nebraska Sex Offender Registry Study. Nebraska State Patrol/State Legislature.
2012	Douglas County Juvenile Assessment Center Service Provider Evaluation.

## Project Evaluator

2016-17	Douglas County Operation Youth Success Evaluation. The TerraLuna Collaborative.
2016-17	A Collaborative Evaluation of the Nebraska Connected Youth Initiative (with WestEd Justice & Prevention Resource Center). The Nebraska Children & Families Foundation.
2016-18	Vocational & Life Skills Evaluation. Nebraska Department of Correctional Services.
2015-17	Minority Health Initiative Evaluation, Colfax and Platte Counties, NE. Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.
2015-16	Vocational & Life Skills Evaluation. Nebraska Department of Correctional Services.
2013-15	Minority Health Initiative Evaluation, Colfax and Platte Counties, NE. Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.
2013-14	Second Chance Act – Evaluating Best Practice Implemented in Juvenile Re-entry
2011-15	Prevalence of Traumatic Brain Injury among Youth at Nebraska Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers. Nebraska Department of Education.

## Selected Research Reports, 2012-2016

<i>Nebraska Department of Correctional Services Classification Tool Development.</i>
<i>EPIC Alternative Education Program: Formative Evaluation Report.</i> 2016. For the Douglas County Youth Center and the Sherwood Foundation.
<i>Alternatives to Detention Theory of Change Report.</i> 2016. For Douglas County and the Sherwood Foundation.
<i>Completely KIDS Final Report (2014-2015).</i> 2016. For Completely KIDS.
<i>Operation Youth Success: Developmental Evaluation Final Report.</i> 2016. For the Sherwood Foundation.
<i>Douglas County Youth Impact! Views of Challenges from the Professionals Involved.</i> 2016. Brief report submitted to the Douglas County Youth Impact! Working Group. Funding Agency: Sherwood Foundation.
<i>Douglas County Youth Impact! Views of Successes from the Professionals Involved.</i> 2016. Brief report submitted to the Douglas County Youth Impact! Working Group. Funding Agency: Sherwood Foundation.
<i>Douglas County Youth Impact! Recommendations from the Professionals Involved.</i> 2016. Brief report submitted to the Douglas County Youth Impact! Working Group. Funding Agency: Sherwood Foundation.
<i>Marijuana Enforcement in Nebraska (2009-2014).</i> 2016. For the Nebraska Legislature.
<i>Adult Justice in Nebraska.</i> 2015. For the Nebraska Legislature.
<i>Project Safe Neighborhoods 2013 Grant Final Evaluation Report.</i> 2015. For the City of Omaha.
<i>The Impact of After-School and Family Strengthening Programs on Student Outcomes: The Completely KIDS Liberty Project.</i> 2015. For Completely KIDS.
<i>Traumatic Brain Injury Screening: Differences between Youth with and without Juvenile Justice System Involvement in Nebraska.</i> 2015. For the Nebraska Office of Vocational Rehabilitation at the Nebraska Department of Education.
<i>Colorado’s Legalization of Medicinal Marijuana: The Effects on Nebraska’s Law Enforcement and Local Jail System.</i> For the Nebraska Legislature.
<i>Nebraska Coalition of Juvenile Justice Strength-Based Assessment.</i> 2015. For the Nebraska Crime Commission.
<i>Trends in Adult Justice.</i> 2014. For the Nebraska Legislature.



Selected Research Reports, 2012-2016

*Examining the Effects of Nebraska’s Good Time Laws: Research Brief.* 2014. For the Nebraska Legislature

*Nebraska Minority Health Initiative, 2013-14 Annual Evaluation Report.* For East-Central District Health Department

*The Transformation Project: Post-Hoc Evaluation Report of a Prison Transition Program.* 2014

*Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program: Evaluation Report.* 2013. For the Nebraska Crime Commission.

*Douglas County Juvenile Assessment Center Analysis of Outcomes by Services.* 2013. For the Douglas County Juvenile Assessment Center (diversion).

*Nebraska Sex Offender Registry Study: Final Report.* 2013. For the Judiciary Committee of the Nebraska Legislature.

*Nebraska Sex Offender Registry Study: Interim Report.* 2012. For the Judiciary Committee of the Nebraska Legislature.

*Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Grant, Nebraska Strategic Plan, 2012-2015.* For the Nebraska Crime Commission.

SELECTED ACADEMIC PRESENTATIONS

2012-2016

Miller, Jennifer (presenter) and Ryan Spohn. “Collaborative Efficacy? Assessing Collective Impact in the Context of Juvenile Justice Reform.” Presented at the 2016 Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences Meetings.

Ellison, Jared M. (presenter) and Ryan Spohn. “Assessing the Consequences of Colorado’s Legalization of Recreational Marijuana on Nebraska.” Presented at the 2016 Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences Meetings.

Butler, H. Daniel (presenter), Starr Solomon, and Ryan Spohn. “Programming in Administrative Segregation: An Evaluation of the Transformation Project.” Presented at the 2015 American Society of Criminology Meetings.

Juliano, Nick, Shawn Johnson Coonfare, Ryan Spohn, and Emily Wright. “Implementation of the Crossover Youth Practice Model (SYPM) in Douglas County: A Unique Public/Private Partnership to Improve the Lives of Youth.” Presented at the 2015 Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities Conference.

Spohn, Ryan and Emily Wright. “Evaluation of Douglas County Youth Impact” Presented at the 2015 Nebraska Juvenile Justice Association Meeting.

Spohn, Ryan (presenter) and Abby Bjornson. “Factors Associated with Perceptions of Rape Events and Reporting of Rape among College and Non-College Women.” Presented at the 2015 Midwest Sociological Society Meeting.

Ellison, Jared (presenter) and Ryan Spohn. “Borders up in smoke: Marijuana enforcement in Nebraska after Colorado’s legalization.” Presented at the 2015 Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences Meeting.

Spohn, Ryan and Kristina Thompson. “African-American Girls and Serious Delinquency: The Role of Friends’ Delinquency, Peer Pressure, and Victimization.” Presented at the 2014 Midwest Sociological Society Meetings.

Spohn, Ryan and Don L. Kurtz. “Perceptions of Respectability and Juvenile Diversion Outcomes by Race in a Midwest Community.” Presented at the 2013 American Society of Criminology Meetings.

Peterson, Johanna C., Ryan Spohn, and Emily M. Wright. “The Differential Impact of Fear of Crime on College Women’s Mental Health Outcomes.” Presented at the 2013 American Society of Criminology Meetings.

Chambers, Jeff, Sandy Lint, Ryan Spohn and Hannah Dietrich. “Partnering with Parents for System Change.” Presented at the 2012 National Conference on Child Abuse & Neglect.



# INVITED PRESENTATIONS

## 2012-2016

- Spohn, Ryan and Jennifer Miller. “Developmental Evaluation.” Presented at the August 2015 meeting of the Omaha Evaluators Group.
- Spohn, Ryan and Anne Hobbs. “Using Data to Inform Good Agency Practice.” Presented at the 2015 Nebraska Justice Alliance Meeting.
- Spohn, Ryan and Emily Wright. “Evaluation of Douglas County Youth Impact!” Presented at the 2015 Nebraska Juvenile Justice Association Meeting.
- Chambers, Jeff and Ryan Spohn. “Traumatic Brain Injury Screening Differences between Youth with and without Juvenile Justice System Involvement in Nebraska.” Presented to Nebraska Brain Injury Advisory Council. Lincoln, NE. June 26, 2015.
- Ellison, Jared and Ryan Spohn. “Borders up in smoke: Marijuana enforcement in Nebraska after Colorado’s legalization.” Presented at the March 2015 meeting of the Omaha Evaluators Group.
- Spohn, Ryan. “Rape and Mental Health Outcomes among Women: Examining the Moderating Effects of “Healthy” Fear Levels.” Presented at the Department of Sociology & Anthropology, University of Nebraska-Omaha, March 10, 2015.
- Spohn, Ryan. “Nebraska Center for Justice Research: Legislative Activities.” Presented at the Omaha Friends and Families of Inmates meeting, Feb. 28, 2015.
- Spohn, Ryan. “Nebraska Center for Justice Research, Creation and Activities.” Presented at the Omaha Friends and Families of Inmates meeting, Sept. 27, 2014.
- Spohn, Ryan. “State Advisory Group Strength-Based Assessment.” Presented at the Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice, September 5, 2014, Boys Town.
- Spohn, Ryan and Laura Schoenrock. “The Transformation Project.” Presented at the UNO/SMSU Restricted Housing Seminar, June 19, 2014, Omaha, NE.
- Spohn, Ryan, Laura Schoenrock, Nicole Kennedy, and Hank Robinson. “The Transformation Project.” Presented at the 2012 Association of State Correctional Administrators Midwest Director’s Conference, Omaha, NE

# PANELS & DISCUSSIONS

## 2014-2016

- Evidence-Based Practice Panel for the Nebraska Children’s Commission Meeting, January 20, 2016.
- Evaluation Panel for Nebraska Minority Health Initiative Technical Assistance Meeting, July 29, 2015.
- Panel Discussant, film on capital punishment: Into the Abyss, for Filmstreams’ Community Development Program and UNO’s Grace Abbott School of Social Work, April 22, 2015.
- Session Chair and Discussant, Contemporary Issues in Criminal Offending and Victimization, Midwest Sociological Society Annual Meeting, March 28, 2015.
- Session Chair, Rational Choice Theories: New Directions and Applications, American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, Nov. 21, 2014, San Francisco, CA
- Evaluation Panel for Nebraska Minority Health Initiative Technical Assistance Meeting, July 30, 2014

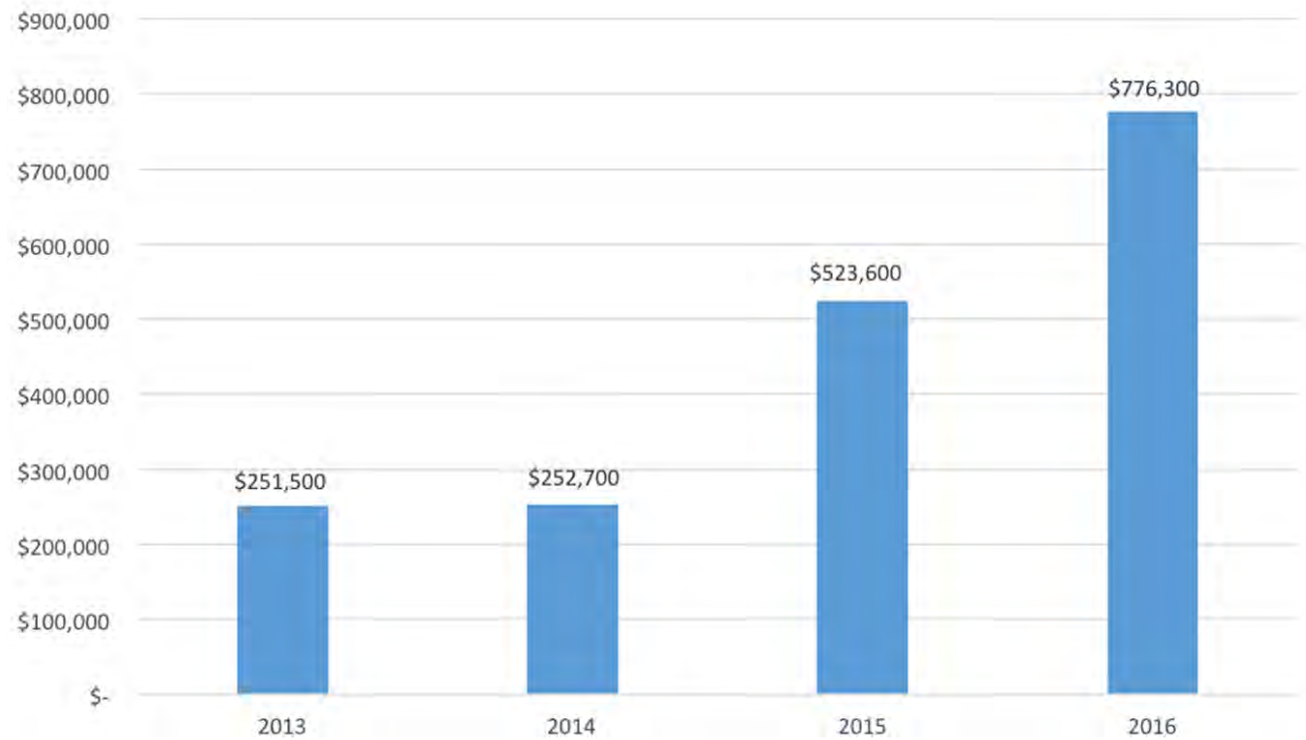
# TRAININGS PROVIDED

## 2013-2016

- Outcomes and Performance Measures: Training for NDCS Reentry Grantees. Training provided for the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services. (June 26, 2015)
- Performance Measure Training: 2014 FY JAG Funds. Funded by the Nebraska Crime Commission (November 3, 2014)
- Developing Outcomes for VOCA & STOP (VAWA) Grant Programs. Funded by the Nebraska Crime Commission. (October 8, 2014)
- Measuring Relevant Processes and Outcomes in Violence Prevention Programs. With Anne Hobbs and Monica Miles-Steffens. Funded by the Nebraska Crime Commission. (June 17, 2014)
- Outcomes and Performance Measures: Training for JAG, STOP VAWA, and VOCA Subgrantees. Funded by the Nebraska Crime Commission. (May 15, 2014)
- Cross-Over Youth. Training provided for Lutheran Family Services. (February 12, 2014)
- Evidence-Based Practices. Training provided for JAG Byrne sub grantees, as requested by the Crime Commission. (June 13, 2013)

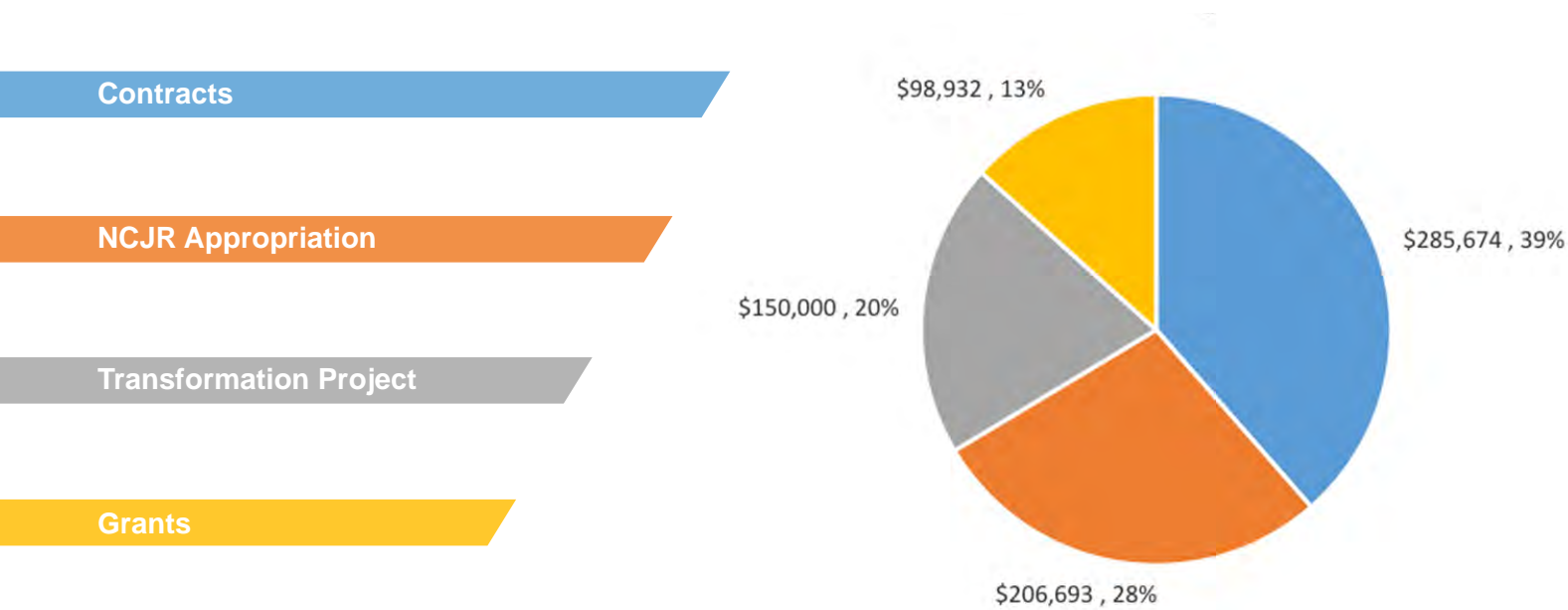
# NCJR BUDGET FISCAL YEAR 2013-2016

Total Budget Fiscal Year 2013-2016



## FISCAL YEAR 2016 BUDGET BREAKDOWN

NCJR Funding Sources



Douglas County Youth Impact! is a practice model designed to prevent “crossover” youth from moving further into the child welfare or juvenile justice systems. The initiative brings together county attorneys, child welfare workers, juvenile justice agents, and youth and family advocates in a “team meeting” to discuss crossover cases with each other, and the youth and their families. This process informs the decision of the county attorney regarding whether to file the case, dismiss it, divert, or require enhanced child welfare services. At each meeting, the crossover youth and their family members are given the opportunity to tell their story and give their perspective on the incident(s) that brought them into the juvenile justice system.

In 2014, researchers from the University of Nebraska, Omaha, with support from the Sherwood Foundation, began an evaluation of the Youth Impact! (YI!) initiative in Douglas County. Among other things, the evaluation is intended to a) understand the processes, successes, and challenges that the team has gone through in order to implement YI! and b) use these “lessons learned” to inform similar and larger initiatives which are designed to enhance the system response to at-risk youth. The following is a brief synopsis the YI! professionals’ views on challenges and successes of the program:

**Noted challenges:** [VIEW NOW](#)

- 1) Differing approaches and philosophies about Crossover Youth
- 2) Implementing change when faced with the realities of “system” work
- 3) Limited resources and no formal or institutionalized structure raises concerns about sustainability over time
- 4) Personal and professional challenges of agency professionals and crossover youth

**Noted successes:** [VIEW NOW](#)

- 1) Better decision-making for crossover youth because decision-makers get a more complete picture of the youth and his or her family situation
- 2) Increased interagency collaboration and reduction in information silos may reduce costs to the system
- 3) Increased trust between professionals and their agencies leads to continued support for the initiative, and fosters energy for continued improvement
- 4) Improved responsiveness to crossover youth and families leads to positive outcomes for them, and benefits the juvenile justice system



## Research / Evaluation Highlight

# OPERATION YOUTH SUCCESS



In the summer of 2014, a subset of leaders and stakeholders in Douglas County initiated a collective impact project to reform the county’s juvenile justice system. Since the first meeting of that group, a number of additional stakeholders have been incorporated into this initiative, which is now known as “Operation Youth Success.” Operation Youth Success, or OYS, has been engaged since that time in an effort to create system change producing a more effective, efficient, and compassionate justice system that better serves the families and youth who are the users of this system. This report will review the activities and progress of OYS through May of 2016.

The overall findings of the evaluation team at this point are as follows:

1. The chief benefit that OYS provides for participants (according to meeting feedback surveys) is an open forum for education, discussion and collaboration; the space for learning and interaction has appeared as consistent themes of “what works well” across groups
2. The Steering Committee now appears to have more fractionalization in terms of what the group “should” be doing, although interviews indicate most members have trust in the processes and in other members to be committed to the initiative’s success
3. Unanticipated consequences from two key decision points (first, to have the Steering Committee allocate community-based aid funds and; second, to open the meetings to the public) have led to setbacks in terms of group openness/trust and cohesiveness for most OYS groups, but chiefly for the Steering Committee
4. Working groups are making considerable progress on their plans but meeting attendance of members has dropped below 50% for most groups since January 2016

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## Research / Evaluation Highlight

# TRANSFORMATION PROJECT



Transformation Project is a prisoner transition and reentry program aimed at improving outcomes for inmates both during their incarceration and upon their release. Transformation Project was first implemented in 2009 for general population inmates and has recently evolved into a program aimed at improving the behavior and outcomes of inmates in restrictive housing.

The vision of Transformation Project is to create a prison system where inmates are committed to the values, attitudes, and behaviors they believe will help them successfully transition through incarceration and reentry.

The mission of Transformation Project is to facilitate prisoners in developing a foundation for learning and motivation to change through a process of self-reflection and goal setting.

The goals of Transformation Project are to create a foundation for change by adhering to the fidelity of Motivational Interviewing principles and the program model, increase participants’ prosocial behavior, and ultimately, reduce recidivism.

We are working to ensure that Transformation Project is an evidence based program that can improve the lives of all inmates. To that end, we have begun developing specialized curriculum for woman and youth in order to meet the unique needs of these populations.

We are also working to develop tools for facilities interested in running the program that will help them utilize the accelerators that already exist in their environment and overcome any barriers in order to encourage the most successful program implementation possible.



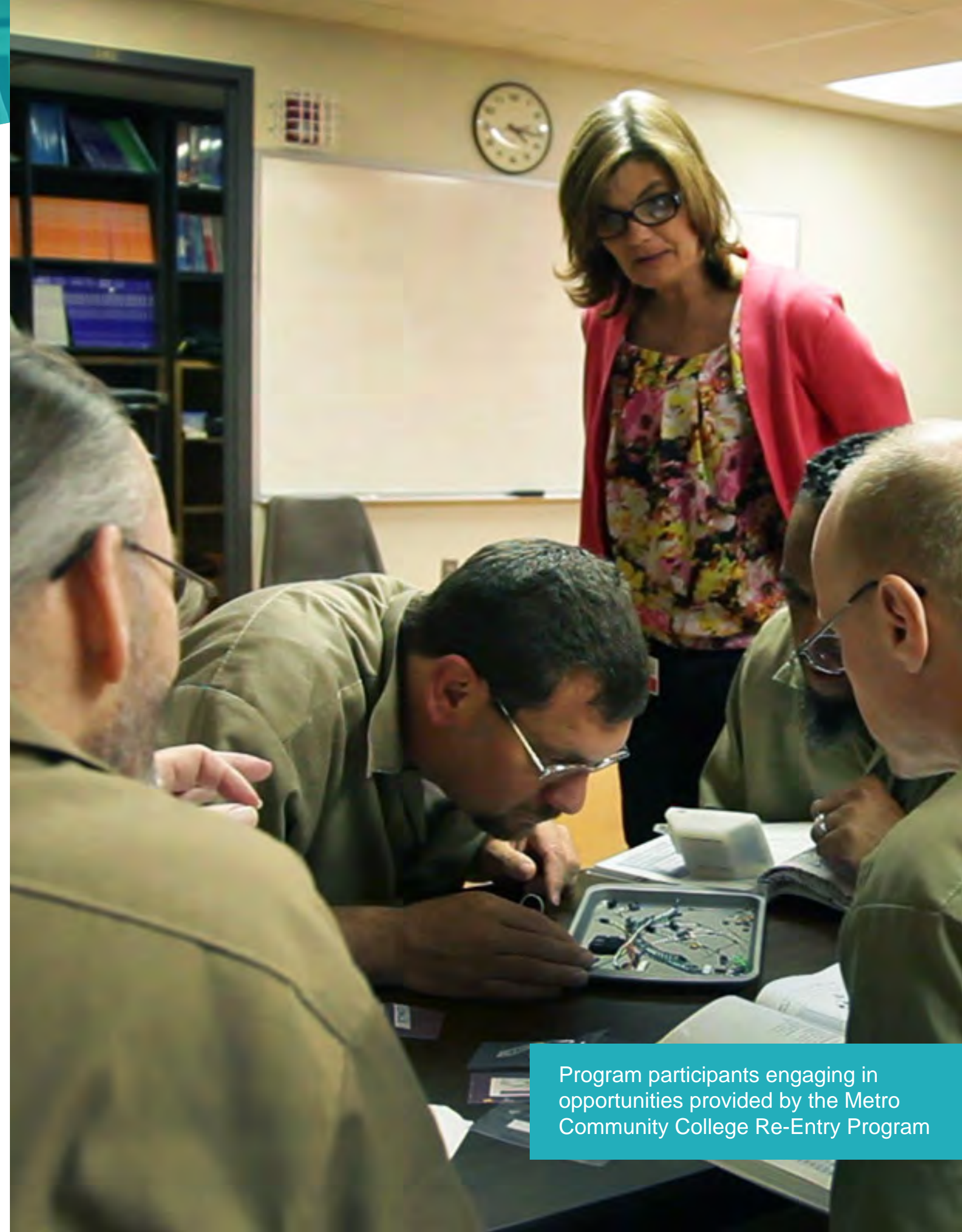
## VOCATIONAL & LIFE SKILLS

The Vocational and Life Skills Program was created by Nebraska Legislative Bill 907 in 2014 with the goals of reducing recidivism and increasing employment for individuals who are incarcerated, who have been incarcerated within the prior 18 months or who are under parole or probation supervision.

The Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) distributed between 8 reentry programs for the first grant cycle that began in February 2015 and ended in June 2016. The programs funded included: Center for People in Need, Goodwill Industries, Mental Health Association of Nebraska, Metropolitan Community College, Prairie Gold Homes, Released and Restored, ResCare Workforce Services and Western Alternative Corrections. Programs provided services on site in Omaha, Lincoln, Hastings and McCook and many also operated out of correctional institutions across the state. Programs offer vocational and life skills services that help participants find and maintain gainful employment, further their education, and deal with other barriers to reentry like housing and transportation. Over the course of the first grant cycle, over 2,400 participants were served in some capacity.

The NCJR evaluation was initiated in May 2016. The primary goal of the evaluation is to identify types of programming and services that best serve the population by reducing recidivism and increasing employment. We provide support to grantees through training and site visits as needed, as well as providing feedback and information to NDCS on the implementation process and data updates. The team developed data collection processes and procedures and provides ongoing technical assistance in data collection across all grantee programs. Qualitative data is also being collected through participant surveys and interviews. A new online database management system was also developed for the second grant cycle and was implemented July 1, 2016.

In addition to program data, institutional data from the department of corrections and probation administration are also being connected back to participants to understand more about violations, revocations and recidivism. Evaluation reports are provided quarterly to the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services. Final reports on the first grant cycle will be available in the coming months.



Program participants engaging in opportunities provided by the Metro Community College Re-Entry Program



# REPORTS ON THE NEBRASKA CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

## Marijuana Enforcement in Nebraska (2009-2014)

### Purpose

Examine trends in law enforcement and corrections related to the possession and sale of marijuana in Nebraska in the first full year of recreational legalization in Colorado.

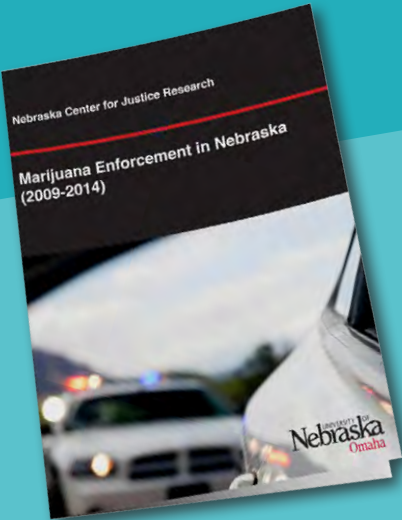
### County Group and Statewide Comparison

According to the testimony of county and state officials in September 2014, counties along the border, in the panhandle, and along the I-80 corridor should be the hardest hit by increases in marijuana arrests, jail admissions and associated costs. These differences should be especially pronounced when these county groups are compared to the remainder of the counties in Nebraska. In addition, we compare these trends to overall trends across the state of Nebraska.

### Main Findings/Conclusions:

- 1) Nebraska’s marijuana arrest rate increased by about 11% (4.10 to 4.55) between 2013 and 2014, and in general, counties along the Colorado border, in the panhandle, and along Interstate 80 had the highest rates of marijuana arrests in 2014
- 2) Overall, increases in marijuana possession arrests have been more substantial than sale/manufacture arrests
- 3) Counties along the Colorado border, in the panhandle, and along Interstate 80 have experienced larger increases in marijuana criminal justice activity relative to the rest of the counties in Nebraska
- 4) Counties along the interstate, and to a lesser extent those along the Colorado border, have been the most affected by increases in marijuana-related jail admissions
- 5) Nebraska spent an estimated 10.2 million dollars on enforcement of marijuana laws in 2014 (i.e., an 11.6% increase from dollars spent in 2013), and I-80 counties were responsible for the majority of this increase.

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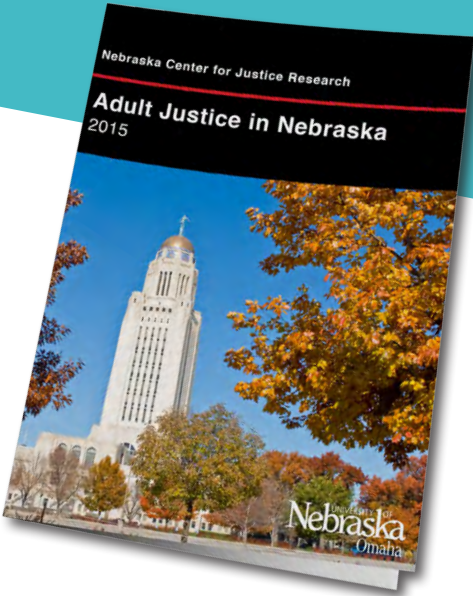
# ADULT JUSTICE IN NEBRASKA (2015)

This report compares criminal justice data across Nebraska from 2010 to 2014. Completed in January, 2016, the document presented the most recent and comprehensive system-wide data available. NCJR will continue to provide updates to this report each year and submit the findings to the Nebraska state legislature. Our hope is that the report serves as a reference guide for providing a clearer understanding of recent trends in crime and criminal justice activities in the state of Nebraska. The report was made possible by the financial support provided to NCJR by LB 907.

The report is organized according to the stages of the process of the criminal justice system:

- Environmental context provides an overview of the population and demographic trends in Nebraska
- System context provides an overview of law enforcement employment
- Offenses provides an overview of crimes reported or known to the police and includes information on the percent of crimes cleared by arrest
- Arrests provides an overview of violent and property crime arrests by districts and compares arrests in Nebraska to neighboring states
- County court provides an overview of the distribution of the county court caseload by district
- District court provides an overview of the distribution of the district court caseload
- Corrections provides data on admissions and correctional populations by factors such as gender, age, race, and correctional institution

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# NDCS Classification Instrument Assessment



A review of the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) current classification tool determined several issues with the development methods of the instrument. It was therefore determined that this system required major improvements and a research project was outlined and contracted by the University of Nebraska-Omaha.

The project was outlined to complete five major project stages.

- 1) First, a process evaluation was completed.
- 2) Second, we reviewed available NDCS data and developed an analysis plan for tool construction. Working with NDCS research staff, we identified a sample frame for initial and reclassification analyses. Ultimately, the samples collected consisted of 9,072 male and 1,582 female initial classification and 35,098 male and 2,449 female reclassification assessments of offenders incarcerated and supervised by the NDCS during the study period of August, 1991 and June, 2015.
- 3) Third, the current classification and reclassification models were assessed for their ability to predict infraction behavior.
- 4) Fourth, feature selection procedures were completed, selecting items that improved prediction of three infractions outcomes – violent, serious, and non-serious. This was completed using several advanced multivariate selection techniques.
- 5) Finally, models were created in an effort to improve upon, and replace, the current classification and reclassification models.

## Study Findings

New models demonstrated substantial improvement. Findings confirmed the predictive improvements gained via the methods and additional data used to develop the new infraction prediction tools.

The resulting models identified risk scores for each offender within a given infraction type. A scoring guide is provided, identifying risk points associated with each tool’s items and responses. Offenders are to be scored on each item and their scores summed. The summary score for each of the three infraction models is designed to place them into one of four categories – High Violent, High Serious, Moderate, and Low (see Figure 1).

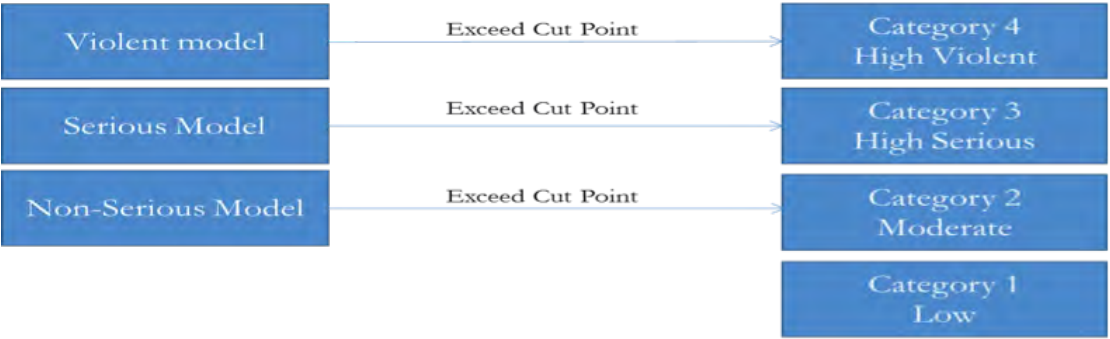


Figure 1. Infraction Risk Categorization

In an effort to improve the classification system, the new tool is designed to inform and support classification staff efforts. Based on themes identified through the process evaluation, staff had indicated several issues that impacted the utility of Hardyman’s classification tools. In particular, the scored classification designation is often overridden as a result of NDCS or offender needs (i.e. bed space availability and programming). Therefore, staff indicated a need for the ability to move offenders to custody designations based on rationales that are not solely based on security.

The current tool provides categories that indicate an offender’s infraction risk, instead of a one-to-one recommendation of custody designation. When used in conjunction with developed NDCS policy guidelines, the new classification schematic provides staff the flexibility to assign offenders to a lower/higher custody designation when agency or offender need requires. The new classification system also informs staff of an offender’s likely infraction type and risk following a transfer to a new facility, providing the opportunity to differentiate supervision strategies once an offender is residing in their new facility. This categorization system is a novel advancement of prior approaches, but represents a change from current practice that will require training and policy development to operate efficiently.

## Recommendations:

- 1. Create an implementation, training, and quality assurance plan
- 2. Continue improving the tool by adding items and collaborating with recent risk assessment efforts
- 3. Create efficient uses of assessment labor by identifying assessment redundancies
- 4. Create an inventory of interventions and forecast agency incarceration needs
- 5. Evaluate override factors and practices

## Next Steps

On July 26, 2016, a team of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) gathered to review the tool and assess its functionality. SMEs were encouraged to provide feedback regarding the assessment items, usability, and overall design. Feasible adjustments to the tools are currently being completed and final models established.

Manuals and training materials are currently being developed to adjust the current classification tools and identify any updated policies and new procedures. These materials will guide training of new staff and provide refreshers for current staff. Goals for booster training and other quality assurance guidelines will also be developed.

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