Strengthening your reentry program evaluation through primary data collection

Second Chance Month

April 28, 2022

This project was supported by Grant No. 2019-MU-BX-K041 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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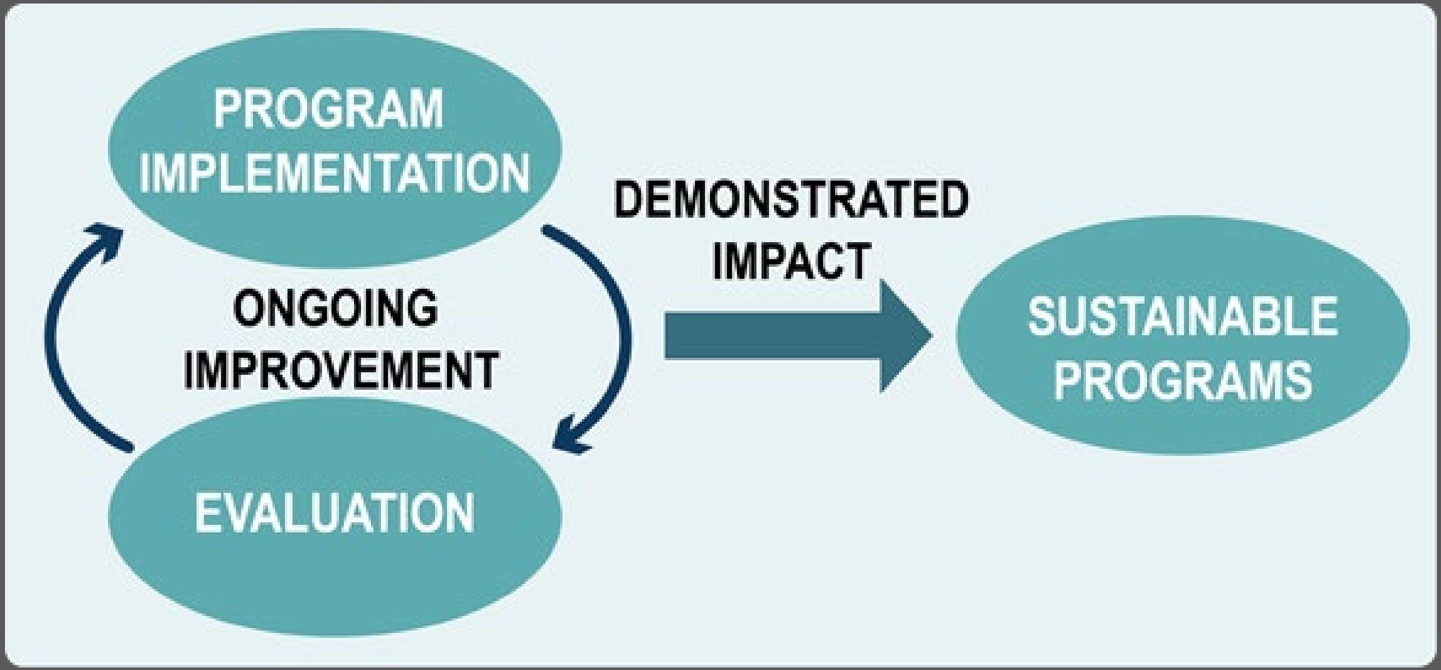
Presenters

- Christine Lindquist, RTI International
    - Project Director for the Evaluation and Sustainability Training and Technical Assistance (ES TTA) Project
- Sam Scaggs, RTI International
- Ryan Spohn, The Nebraska Center for Justice Research
- Michael Campagna, The Nebraska Center for Justice Research

About the Evaluation and Sustainability Training and Technical Assistance (ES TTA) Project



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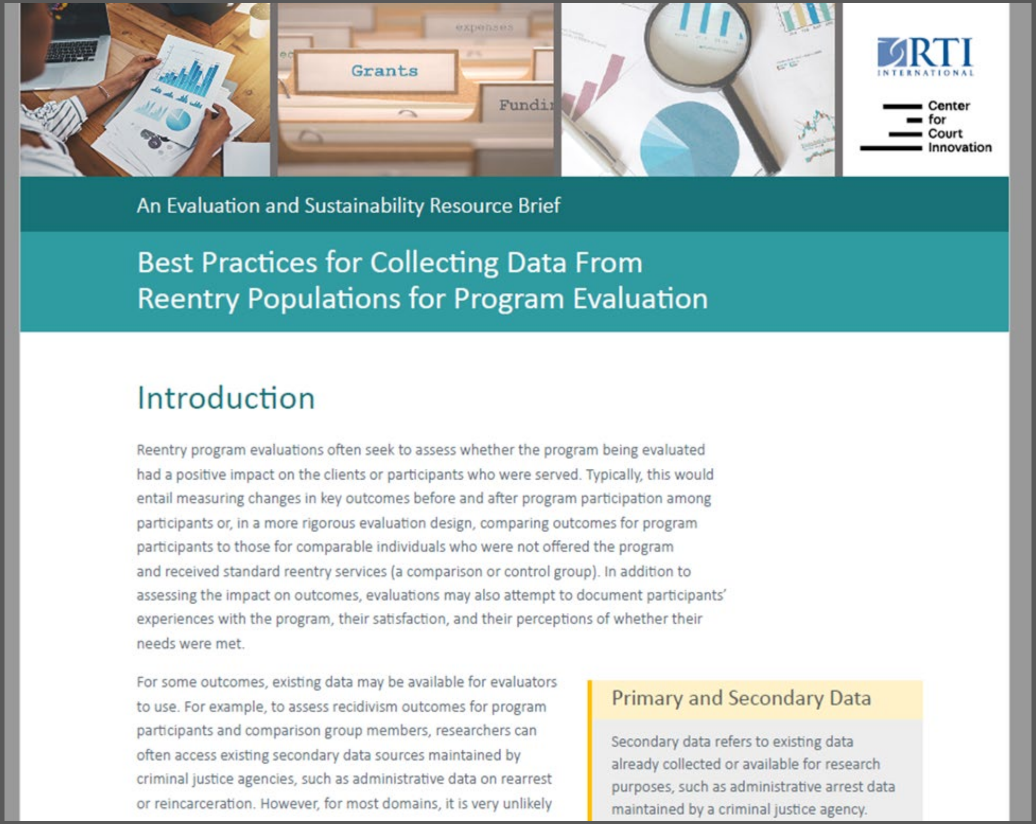
Center for Court Innovation

Where to Find Our Products

Overview of Today's Webinar

1. Why would primary data collection be needed among reentry populations?
   - "Reentry populations"
     - Program participants who are incarcerated, formerly incarcerated, or reentering
     - Similar individuals serving as a comparison or control group for evaluation purposes
2. How to get started
   - Summary of best practices discussed in a just-released brief on this topic
3. Real-world application from SCA grant research partner
   - Nebraska Center for Justice Research



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Center for Court Innovation

An Evaluation and Sustainability Resource Brief

Best Practices for Collecting Data From Reentry Populations for Program Evaluation

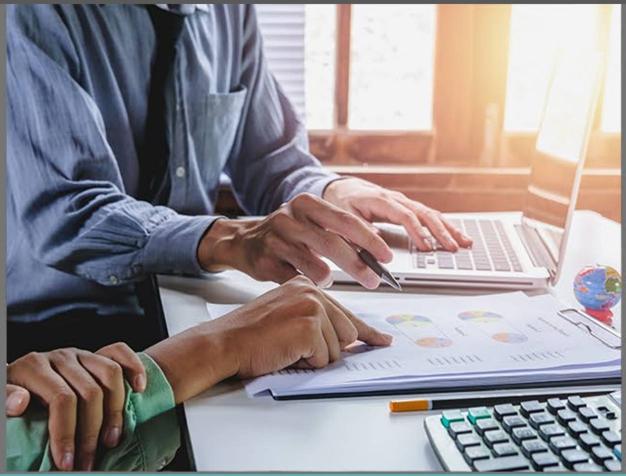
Introduction

Reentry program evaluations often seek to assess whether the program being evaluated had a positive impact on the clients or participants who were served. Typically, this would entail measuring changes in key outcomes before and after program participation among participants or, in a more rigorous evaluation design, comparing outcomes for program participants to those for comparable individuals who were not offered the program and received standard reentry services (a comparison or control group). In addition to assessing the impact on outcomes, evaluations may also attempt to document participants' experiences with the program, their satisfaction, and their perceptions of whether their needs were met.

For some outcomes, existing data may be available for evaluators to use. For example, to assess recidivism outcomes for program participants and comparison group members, researchers can often access existing secondary data sources maintained by criminal justice agencies, such as administrative data on rearrest or reincarceration. However, for most domains, it is very unlikely

Primary and Secondary Data

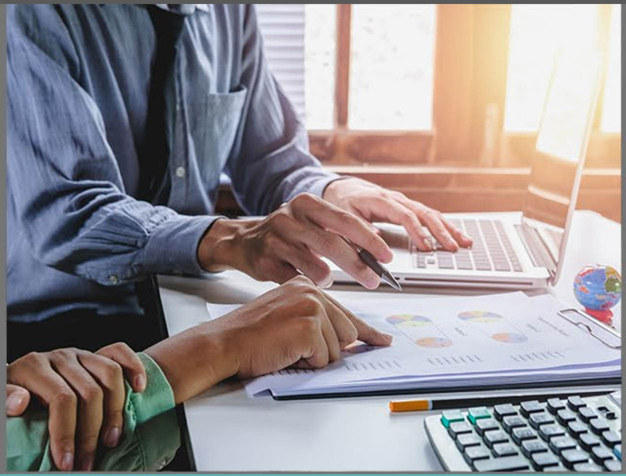
Secondary data refers to existing data already collected or available for research purposes, such as administrative arrest data maintained by a criminal justice agency.



Why Would Primary Data Collection Be Needed?

Necessary when…

- Outcomes you want to look at are not available from any existing data source (or not available for everyone in your study population)
    - *Examples*: housing situation, substance use, mental health
- There is no other way to learn about program participants' perceptions of the program
    - *Examples*: satisfaction, whether needs were met



How to Get Started
(and ES TTA Resources That Might Help)

Best practices from federally funded, multisite reentry evaluations on how to go about…

1. Determining what data need to be collected and from whom
2. Determining the timing of your primary data collection effort
3. Determining the best mode of data collection
4. Designing your data collection instrument
5. Developing and implementing data collection protocols

1. Determining *What* Data to Collect and From *Whom*

- Specify your key research questions
- List the *constructs* (topics) that need to be measured and the *population* for which each construct is needed
- Identify any existing data already available on the construct (and for each population)
- Identify any primary data that need to be collected to fill in gaps

Example (From Resource Brief)

1 *Did the program reduce criminal thinking for program participants?*

Key Construct	Population for Which Data on the Construct Are Needed
• Criminal thinking	Program participants only

2 *Did the program improve recidivism, employment, and housing outcomes for program participants compared to comparison group members?*

Key Construct	Population for Which Data on the Construct Are Needed:
• Recidivism • Employment • Housing	Both program participants and comparison group members

3 *How satisfied with the program were participants? Were different types of participants equally satisfied with the program?*

Key Construct	Population for Which Data on the Construct Are Needed:
• Satisfaction • Demographics: age, gender, race/ethnicity	Program participants only

2. Determining the *Timing* of Your Data Collection

- What time point makes sense for individual study sample members? How many time points are needed?
  - *Examples*: at jail intake, 1 month pre-release, 3 months post-release
  - Standardized reference points based on criminal justice status make sense
  - Decisions depend on your program's service model and the research questions, along with logistical and budget considerations
- What will the overall data collection schedule be?
  - *Example*: Years 2 and 3
  - This decision is interrelated with the first one, so map out your plans in a timeline

Example (From Resource Brief)

Milestone	YEAR 1				YEAR 2				YEAR 3				YEAR 4			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Program milestones																
Program planning phase																
Program enrollment																
Program service delivery (each enrolled client receives 6 months of services)																
Evaluation **milestones**																
Evaluation design phase																
Baseline interviews conducted (with those enrolled before Q3 of Year 3)																
12-month follow-up interviews (with those enrolled before Q3 of Year 3)																
Administrative recidivism data obtained																
Data analysis and reporting																

Determining Your Data Collection *Mode*

- Most common modes for collecting data with reentry populations
  - Focus groups: open-ended discussions among a small number of participants on non-sensitive topics
  - Interviews: an interviewer asks questions of each respondent individually, either in person or via telephone or video
  - Self-administered surveys: respondents answer questions themselves via pencil and paper, web, or text survey
- Mode decision should depend on the constructs to be measured, the available budget for data collection, and logistical factors (e.g., staff availability, technology available)

For More on Modes, See the Resource Brief

Modes	Advantages	Limitations	Other Considerations
Focus groups	• Require very little time to implement • Can be done repeatedly throughout the evaluation to collect data on specific topics	• Require a trained facilitator • Cannot be used for sensitive topics • Participants might be discouraged from speaking out in a group setting • Risk that participants may not keep the discussion confidential	• Are appropriate only when opinions from a small subsample of the population are useful and there is no need for individual-level data • *In person or virtual?* o In-person: generally builds stronger group rapport; works well when participants already show up to a central location o Virtual: could increase the representation of some participants because travel is not required (but technology is required); offer more confidentiality; work well when public health conditions prevent in-person groups
Interviews	• Typically generate the highest quality and most complete data • Allow for more constructs to be covered because of rapport with interviewer • Do not require high literacy among respondents	• Require trained interviewers • Are time-consuming for interviewers and respondent • May be subject to social desirability bias, which could prevent truthful responses for sensitive topics (but can use self-administered techniques)	• *In-person or by telephone or video?* o In-person: highest rapport and longest interviews possible; require a private interview location and travel to that location o Phone/video: reduce time and travel burden and work well when public health conditions prevent in-person interviews, but some respondents may not have required technology

Designing Your Data Collection Instrument

- List the constructs for which questions are needed
- Identify possible items or scales that could be used to measure
  - Start with existing items or scales that are publicly available
    - Compendium of such items developed by the ES TTA team
    - Review documentation about the process/population for which items were developed
    - Review information about validity and reliability
    - Consider which items seem the most appropriate for your population
    - Consider whether adaptations are needed
  - If needed, develop your own items and response options
    - Consider pretesting new items
- Assemble final instrument
  - Question order, response options, instructions

Example From Resource Brief (Compendium)

Interview Domains	Constructs	
Demographics/Background	• Date of birth • Gender • Race/ethnicity • Country of birth • Veteran status • Educational attainment	• Vocational certifications • Currently taking courses • Marital status • Relationship status • Parental status • Child support
Housing	• Living situation (past and current) • Contributing to cost of housing	• Housing is public or Section 8 • Number of places lived • Living with others
Employment and Income	• Any employment • Current employment • Specific sources of income (public assistance, friends or relatives, under the table/casual, illegal activities) • Reasons for no employment	• Number of jobs • Job full-/part-time • Monthly income from job • Type of pay (formal, self-employment, under the table) • Benefits (health insurance, paid leave)

Housing

The next questions ask about your housing situation.

During six months before you were incarcerated this time/Since your release on (date), have you lived …

1 In your own house or apartment, meaning your name was on the title, mortgage, or lease
2 In someone else's house or apartment, including your parents' place
3 In a residential treatment facility
4 In a transitional housing facility or halfway house
5 In a shelter
6 On the street or you were homeless
7 In no set place or you moved around a lot
8 In some other place or situation?
Don't know
Refused

Since your release/last interview on (date), has any program helped you pay rent, such as through a special program, public housing, or Section 8, or a Housing Choice voucher?

1 Yes
2 No
Don't know
Refused

Since your release/last interview on (date), how many different places have you lived? Please do not include any correctional facilities.

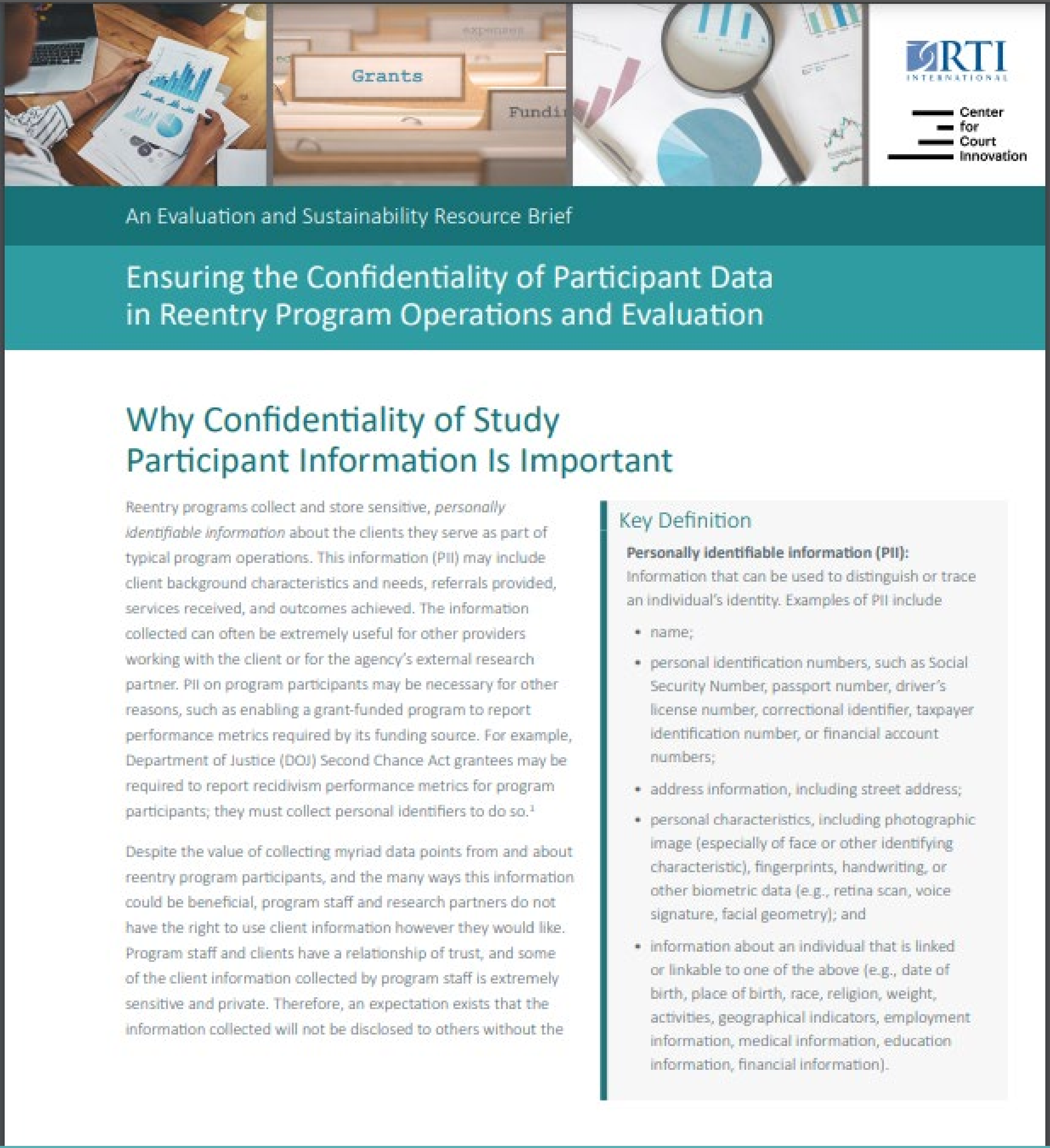
1 1
2 2 or 3
3 4 or 5
4 More than 5
Don't know
Refused

Designing and Implementing Data Collection Protocols

- Follow human subjects protection standards
  - Participation should be voluntary
    - This requires agreements with any correctional partners involved
    - Administer an informed consent form that covers key elements
  - Data should be kept private and confidential
    - Hold any interviews or focus groups in a private setting
    - Keep respondents' data secure (and limit personally identifiable information)
    - Train data collection staff on study protocols
- Other best practices for increasing participation and data quality
  - Explore providing incentives if allowed
  - Consider data collection staff with similar backgrounds as participants
  - Develop strong recruitment and retention procedures

More on Protecting the Confidentiality of Data

https://nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/resources/ensuring-confidentiality-participant-data-reentry-program-operations-and-evaluation


An Evaluation and Sustainability Resource Brief

Ensuring the Confidentiality of Participant Data in Reentry Program Operations and Evaluation

Why Confidentiality of Study Participant Information Is Important

Reentry programs collect and store sensitive, *personally identifiable information* about the clients they serve as part of typical program operations. This information (PII) may include client background characteristics and needs, referrals provided, services received, and outcomes achieved. The information collected can often be extremely useful for other providers working with the client or for the agency's external research partner. PII on program participants may be necessary for other reasons, such as enabling a grant-funded program to report performance metrics required by its funding source. For example, Department of Justice (DOJ) Second Chance Act grantees may be required to report recidivism performance metrics for program participants; they must collect personal identifiers to do so.[1]

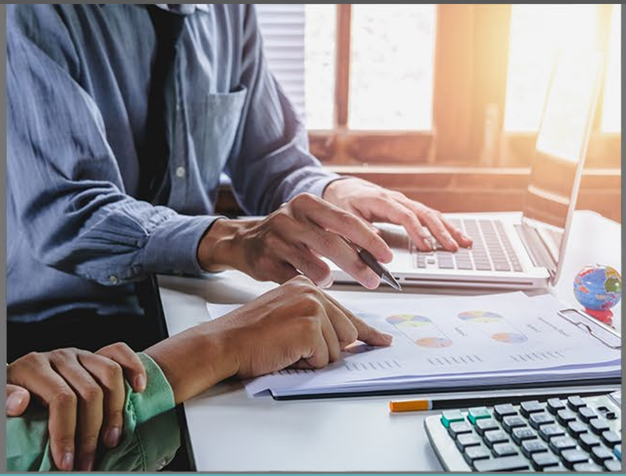
Despite the value of collecting myriad data points from and about reentry program participants, and the many ways this information could be beneficial, program staff and research partners do not have the right to use client information however they would like. Program staff and clients have a relationship of trust, and some of the client information collected by program staff is extremely sensitive and private. Therefore, an expectation exists that the information collected will not be disclosed to others without the

Key Definition

Personally identifiable information (PII): Information that can be used to distinguish or trace an individual's identity. Examples of PII include

- name;
- personal identification numbers, such as Social Security Number, passport number, driver's license number, correctional identifier, taxpayer identification number, or financial account numbers;
- address information, including street address;
- personal characteristics, including photographic image (especially of face or other identifying characteristic), fingerprints, handwriting, or other biometric data (e.g., retina scan, voice signature, facial geometry); and
- information about an individual that is linked or linkable to one of the above (e.g., date of birth, place of birth, race, religion, weight, activities, geographical indicators, employment information, medical information, education information, financial information).





Real-World Data Collection Experiences

Primary Data Collection and Reentry Evaluation: Real-World Applications, Challenges, and Recommendations

Dr. Michael Campagna
Dr. Ryan Spohn

Nebraska Center for Justice Research

April 28, 2022

This project was supported by Grant Nos. 2019-CY-BX-007 and 2019-SM-BX-0004 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

University of Nebraska Omaha

Outline of Our Presentation

1. Introduction to our agency and collaborations with BJA-funded projects
2. Our common mode of data collection: mixed-methods
3. Issues of sample selection bias and methods for reducing its impact on evaluation findings
4. Outcomes: Not just recidivism?
5. Conclusions

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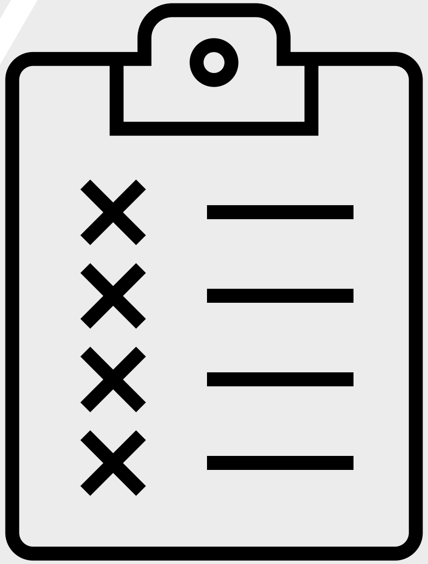

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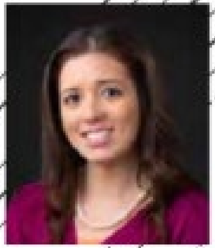

Katelynn Towne, Ph.D.

Research Coordinator

- One of two research centers affiliated with the nationally ranked School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha
- The *mission* of the NCJR 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.

BJA-Funded Research Partner Collaborations

- The Nebraska Center for Justice Research (NCJR) is currently the research partner on two BJA grants:

1. The Safer Foundation's "Achieving Change Together" Program, recipient of 2019 Second Chance Act funding (Quad Cities, Iowa)
2. Nebraska Board of Parole's "Reducing Violence/Recidivism through VRP Aftercare and CBI Open Groups" (statewide)

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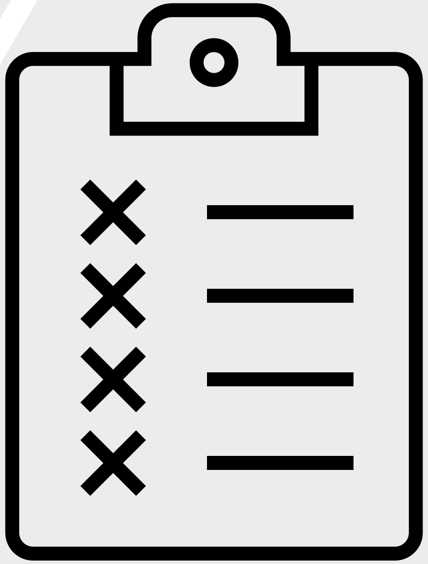

Primary Data Collection Methods

- NCJR generally adopts a *mixed-method* approach for large-scale reentry evaluations
- Mixed-method approaches generally include both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection
  - *Qualitative methods*: Conducting interviews or focus groups, transcribing the conversation, and searching for meaningful patterns and themes in the data (primary data collection)
  - *Quantitative methods*: Surveying reentry clients using Likert-type scales (primary data collection); retrieving data on "returns to prison" from a department of corrections database (secondary data collection)

Why Use Mixed-Method Approaches for Reentry Evaluation?

1. Some stakeholders just want to "see the numbers" (quantitative), whereas others prefer the greater context and meaning of qualitative approaches
2. Quantitative data in our evaluations most often focus on long-term outcomes such as recidivism, whereas interviews and focus groups can occur in earlier stages of a project
3. Qualitative methods are useful for assessing the process of an initiative or as a process of quality assurance

   <u>Examples</u>:

   a. How is this program helping you to stay sober?
   b. What else could this program do to help you find a job?
   c. If you could change one thing to improve this program, what would it be?

4. The qualitative data collected through primary data provide information that cannot be obtained through other methods

Outline of Our Presentation (3)

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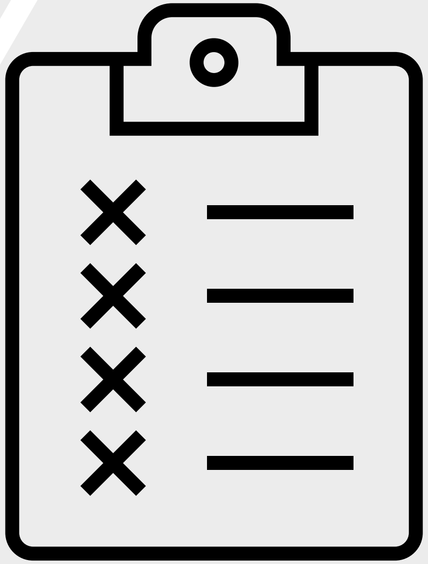

Sampling Bias

- Bias can occur in non-randomly assigned samples
    - Those more likely to respond are different from those less likely to respond
- Collecting data on all participants is uncommon
    - Often lose non-completers
    - Some just want to be done with system
- Task is to build an argument for why your study matters
    - Address sampling bias by carefully defining sampling frame and describing its context
- Purposive sampling

Reiterative Sampling Methodology

- Sample selection
  - (First, determine if grantee understands **why** administer a survey)
  - **Who** will take the survey – justify
- Develop survey methodology
  - **What** will be on the survey – justify
  - **When** to administer the survey – justify
  - **How** to administer the survey – justify
- Use research questions and interventions as context
- Review sample selection to ensure "who" still makes sense

Methods Road Map

1. Do research partners and practitioners all understand the primary goals of the evaluation?
2. What concepts need to be captured?
3. Who will be selected to participate?
4. When, for each “who” or “what,” will data be collected?
5. How will data be collected?

<u>Example</u>:

a. Marginally; explain that the program is being examined for impact

b. Examine quality-of-life measures (outcomes)

c. Completed participants for outcomes

d. Quality-of-life scale for participants 2 weeks before program and 90 days after program completion

e. Participants will be given a short, structured interview by staff

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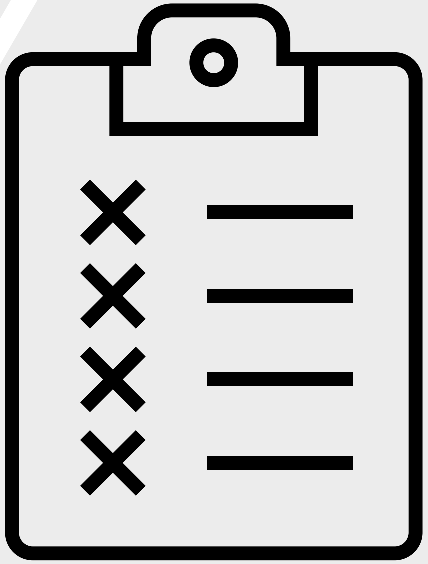

Research and Theory on Desistance

- Modern research and theory on desistance, including a recent report released by the National Institute of Justice, suggests that desistance is a more complex and nuanced process than a simple yes/no measure of recidivism, such as returns to prison
- “Desistance is the process by which criminality, or the individual risk for antisocial conduct declines over the life-course.” (Rocque, 2021)

Desistance

- The process of desistance is unlikely to be uniform, smooth, or reversible (Rocque, 2021)
- “Returns to prison,” as a binary measure derived from the criminal justice system, is an extremely coarse measure of success or failure
- Compare to a binary measure of health that simply captures “alive” or “dead”
- Our outcome measures of reentry should be…
  - Multiple
  - Continuous
  - Less biased by system actions
  - Strength-based (when possible)
- More holistic measures of reentry success often depend on primary data collection, as they are not readily available in administrative data

Outcomes: Not Just Recidivism?

We recommend adopting as many short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes as possible

Adoption of outcomes typically depends upon…

- Program goals
- Research methods adopted
- Resources available for data collection
- Duration of project/funding
- Data sharing availability with agencies holding administrative data

Outline of Our Presentation (5)

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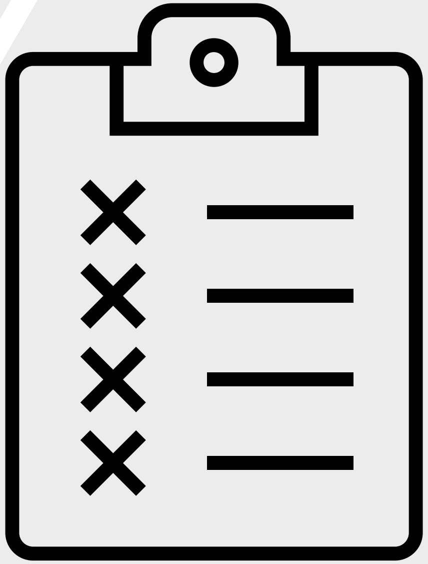
5. **Conclusions**



Conclusions

- We recommend the use of mixed methods for process measures and outcome measures (when possible). Primary data collection is a method for collecting essential data that are not readily available from existing sources.
- Sampling bias is a constant threat to reentry research, as the factors that affect criminality also influence which persons are unresponsive or unavailable for data collection efforts. Put simply, sample bias invalidates evaluation findings.
- No measure of desistance is perfect, and “returns to prison” is an inadequate measure of desistance or recidivism. Primary data collection allows multiple and more holistic measures to be examined.

UNIVERSITY OF Nebraska Omaha

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