



The Justice Reinvestment Initiative

Experiences from the Local Sites

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Justice reinvestment is a data-driven approach to criminal justice reform designed to examine and address cost and population drivers and generate cost savings that can be reinvested in high-performing public safety strategies.

State and local leaders across the country are striving to improve public safety and maximize return on corrections investments. To support this work, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) began funding technical assistance providers and state and local jurisdictions to engage in the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) in 2010.¹ JRI convenes justice system stakeholders and policy leaders to devise data-driven approaches to criminal justice reform, with the goal of generating cost savings that can be reinvested in high-performing public safety strategies.

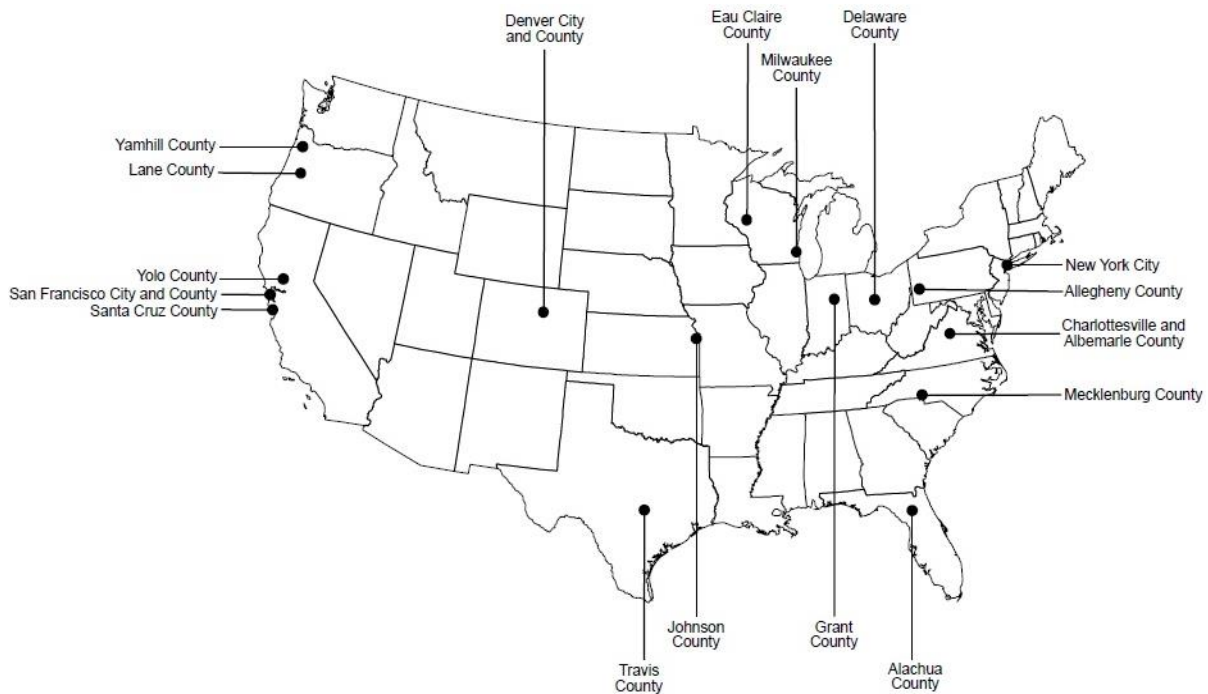
To date, 24 states and 17 localities have engaged in JRI, and the Urban Institute has been collecting data on and monitoring the progress of each of these sites. This brief summarizes interim findings from an assessment of the progress and activities of the 17 local sites identified in figure 1 on the following page.

Local JRI Collaborators

- **Bureau of Justice Assistance:** Funds and oversees JRI
 - **The Center for Effective Public Policy:** Provides technical assistance for JRI local sites
 - **Crime and Justice Institute:** Provides technical assistance for JRI local sites
 - **Urban Institute:** Assesses and coordinates JRI
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FIGURE 1

Local JRI Sites



JRI in Action

The local justice reinvestment model is built on a foundation of collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and strategic planning. If a collaborative body does not already exist, local jurisdictions form an interagency working group consisting of key criminal justice leaders, such as law enforcement officers, public defenders, prosecutors, pretrial agencies, judges, probation officers, county commissioners, and representatives from community organizations. This group is responsible for developing an organizational strategy and purpose, as well as guiding the jurisdiction through its justice reinvestment activities.

The interagency working group collaborates with a technical assistance provider to collect and analyze system-wide criminal justice data. Through data analysis, jurisdictions identify the drivers that are contributing to their corrections populations and associated costs. To reduce the impact of these drivers, jurisdictions identify strategies to employ criminal justice resources more efficiently, including those strategies designed to reduce or slow the growth of jail populations. Once the JRI collaborative reaches consensus on an array of strategies, it implements the new policies or programs while documenting cost savings and the effect on system outcomes (e.g., average daily jail population, revocation rates, average case processing time). JRI's ultimate goal is for the cost savings generated by these reforms to be reinvested into effective public safety strategies.

The justice reinvestment model is an iterative approach requiring ongoing assessment of implemented strategies to ensure they are yielding the intended results and, if not, making appropriate midcourse corrections.

Population and Cost Drivers

Across the local sites, system-wide data analyses found several common drivers of jail populations and costs (see figure 2):²

Pretrial Defendants

Nationally, pretrial defendants make up about 60 percent of the jail population.³ In JRI local sites that identified the pretrial population as a driver, the share ranged from 45 to 84 percent. Common reasons for high rates include (1) the lack of risk assessment tools to determine which defendants can remain in the community with little risk to public safety and with little risk of failure to appear for court, and (2) reliance on a cash bail system whereby low-risk defendants are detained because of an inability to post bail.

Delays in Case Processing

Delays in case processing result in defendants remaining in jail for longer than necessary, thereby increasing costs. A number of factors can lead to extended case processing times, including court delays and continuances, paperwork inefficiencies, and staffing shortages.

Frequent Jail Users (Including Mentally Ill and Homeless Populations)

Chronic jail users are the small fraction of people who consume a disproportionately large share of jail resources. These repeat clients often struggle with mental health problems, substance addiction, and homelessness. They also use significant resources in the hospital and treatment community. Sites observed that while the number of frequent users is relatively small, reducing jail stays for this population could have a meaningful impact on costs while improving individual outcomes through diversion to enhanced treatment and services in the community.

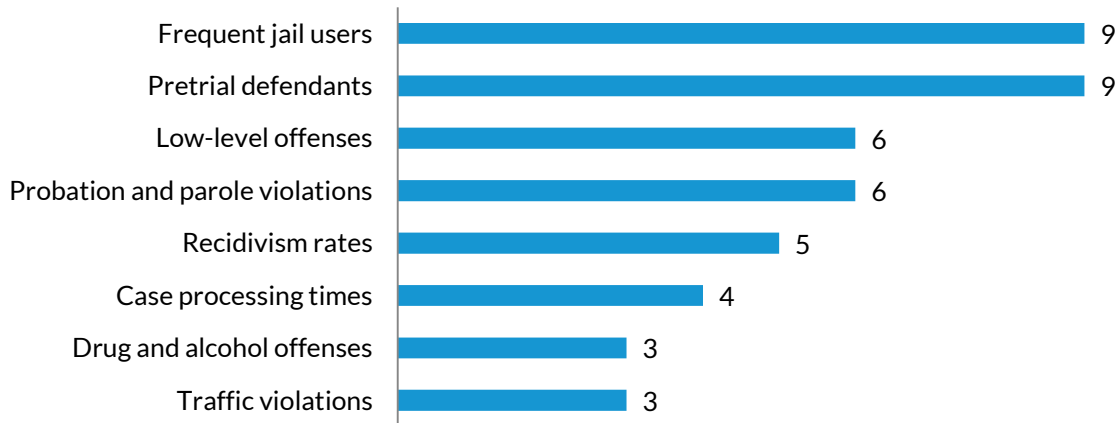
Low-Level Drug, Alcohol, and Traffic Offenses

Several sites observed that their jail populations were largely composed of defendants charged with low-level offenses, which often included drug and traffic charges. These charges included misdemeanor drug possession, public intoxication, driving without a license, driving under the influence, and other misdemeanors such as petty theft and simple assault.

FIGURE 2

Common Jail Population and Cost Drivers

Number of sites identifying driver



Probation and Parole Violations and Recidivism Rates

Probation and parole violations can result in jail stays, and high recidivism rates can drive growth in jail populations and costs. Factors related to these drivers include insufficient resources for supervision, support services, and treatment options in the community.

Identified Policy Responses

JRI localities have identified a number of policy strategies for implementing cost-effective, evidence-based solutions to existing challenges (see figure 3). The most common responses include the following:

Improving Risk Assessment Tools

To prioritize who to detain, who to supervise, and who is in most need of treatment and services, several sites sought to improve their ability to assess defendants' and inmates' risk levels and needs by developing site-specific risk and needs assessments or expanding the use of such tools across the system. Johnson County, Kansas, has used its data and research on best practices to develop pretrial risk assessment and release and detention guidelines. Using a risk score and offense type, the guidelines recommend detention or release depending on whether an individual is classified as being at low, moderate, significant, or extreme risk of failure to appear or new criminal activity.

Expanding Jail Diversion and Alternative-to-Jail Programs

Seven sites adopted strategies that expanded jail diversion (e.g., deferred prosecution programs) and jail programming (e.g., inmate transition programs) as well as increased access to employment and education services. Milwaukee County's early-intervention strategy consists of pretrial diversion for

low-risk defendants and deferred prosecution for medium-risk defendants. During the course of the programs, which last between 6 and 12 months, individuals must successfully meet certain conditions to have all charges dropped (for diversion) or have recorded charges reduced or dismissed (for deferred prosecution).

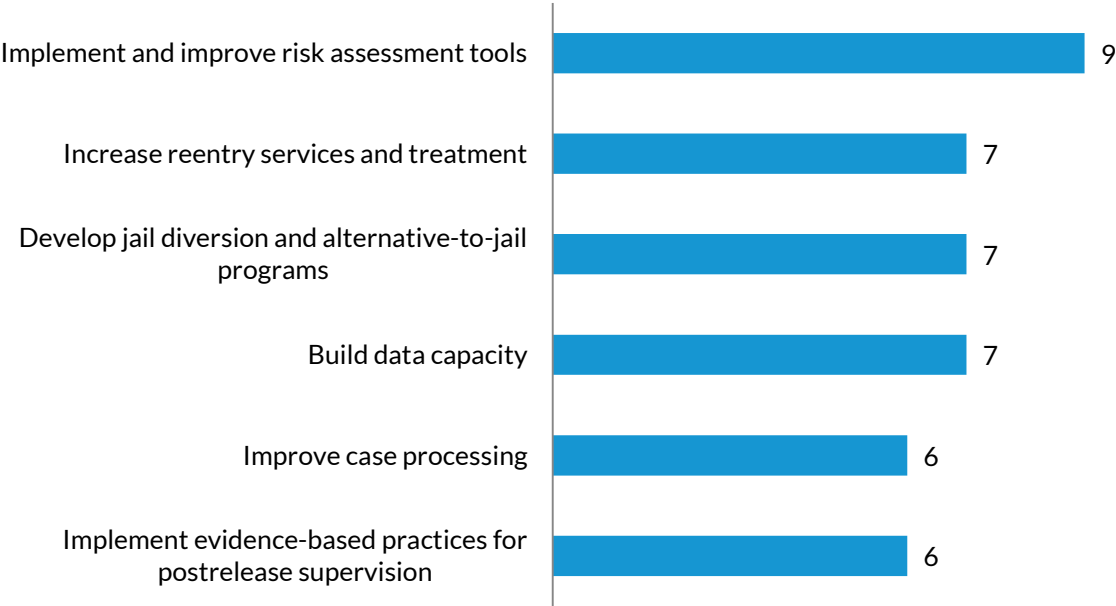
Streamlining Case Processing

A number of sites improved case processing by adopting strategies to reduce failure-to-appear rates and hiring jail release coordinators to expedite cases. Alachua County, Florida, hired a jail release coordinator. In less than two months, the coordinator reviewed 101 cases, 48 of which experienced an expedited release from the Alachua County Jail.

Increasing Access to Reentry Services and Treatment

Several sites focused on increasing criminal justice clients’ access to reentry services, including substance abuse and mental health treatment. These efforts included increasing inmates’ access to recovery services in jail, helping those with criminal records access supportive housing, and diverting clients to community-based treatment in lieu of incarceration. Eau Claire, Wisconsin, is creating a new program to address the needs and reduce the recidivism of moderate-risk Operating While Intoxicated (OWI) offenders with a second or subsequent OWI conviction. The new program is less expensive than housing these same offenders in the secure jail and also provides access to needed treatment.

FIGURE 3
Common Cost-Saving Public Safety Strategies
Number of sites identifying strategy



Building Data Capacity and Implementing Evidence-Based Practices

Other strategies sites employed to enhance criminal justice system efficiency included building or expanding data capacity (e.g., using business intelligence software to analyze jail data) and implementing evidence-based practices for post-release supervision (e.g., probation violation matrices). Grant County, Indiana, is developing a data dashboard to afford all stakeholders in its criminal justice system access to data in real time. Currently, the dashboard is being implemented by the Indiana Supreme Court's Division of State Court Administration and focuses on 14 data points, including monthly calculations of average daily jail population and average length of stay as well as probation outcomes. Indiana intends to use the dashboard as a template for other jurisdictions.

Evidence-Based Practices

Evidence-based practices (EBPs) are programs and policies that research finds effective. They are a key component of JRI policy reforms. Through JRI, localities learn how to translate EBPs into policy, apply EBPs to organizational practice, and consider the use of EBPs when making funding decisions. JRI sites are implementing the following EBPs:

- Improving and implementing risk and needs assessments
- Implementing problem-solving courts
- Employing intermediate sanctions and incentives
- Expanding access to evidence-based programs
- Monitoring the effectiveness of new programs

Savings and Reinvestment

The ultimate goal of JRI is to implement policy and practice solutions that generate savings that can be reinvested in high-performing public safety strategies. At present, most local JRI sites are beginning to implement strategies to improve efficiencies in the system, reduce recidivism, and produce savings for reinvestment. While they have not yet documented effects, many of the local sites have projected the anticipated population changes and cost savings of their strategies and planned reinvestment activities (see box on the next page).

Spotlight: Projected Savings and Reinvestment Priorities

Albemarle County-Charlottesville, VA, plans to open a day reporting center targeting eligible pretrial defendants, nonviolent offenders, and probation violators for specialized treatment, intervention, and monitoring. The county anticipates diverting 10 to 20 percent of the jail population to the center annually, resulting in the closure of one housing unit and savings of over \$200,000 a year, which will be reinvested in the day-to-day operation of the center.

Delaware County, OH, will implement a probation violation response matrix, establish a specialized court program for repeat Operating a Vehicle Impaired offenders, and offer early intervention to expedite the resolution of lower-level felony cases, resulting in projected savings of over \$600,000 annually. Savings will be redirected toward the development and expansion of critical mental health and substance abuse treatment services.

Eau Claire County, WI, projects it will avert at least \$173,260 in secure jail bed costs a year and avoid \$3.2 million in construction costs over the next five years by implementing a pretrial program and transferring 30 Operating While Intoxicated offenders from the secure jail to a work release facility.

Grant County, IN, plans to reallocate probation caseloads to focus more resources on medium- and high-risk offenders, with anticipated savings of more than \$112,970 annually. Grant County is also exploring diversion opportunities that could provide an additional savings of over \$100,842 annually. Savings will be redirected toward evidence-based supervision activities.

Johnson County, KS, has focused on a variety of strategies to ensure that the right person is in the right bed for the right amount of time. Reduced jail admissions are projected to save \$1,240,198 over three years, which includes annual savings of \$350,000 from the closure of a jail module. The county plans to reinvest savings in these strategies, further analysis, and other identified drivers.

Mecklenburg County, NC, estimates that its JRI strategies, including a citation-in-lieu-of-arrest policy, will result in a 10 percent reduction in arrests, court processes, and jail use. It is anticipated that this reduction will save at least \$5,410,950 over four years, which will be reinvested in mental health crisis support, prisoner reentry efforts, and improved efficiency of law enforcement time.

Milwaukee, WI, is implementing pretrial diversion and deferred prosecution programs expected to free up 94,535 jail bed days over five years, for a projected savings of \$4,700,000. The site intends to reinvest these savings to increase the programs' capacity by 25 percent and sustain them over time.

San Francisco, CA, plans to expand pretrial release through the validation and implementation of a pretrial assessment tool to inform court decisions. If releases increase by just 10 percent as a result of the tool, San Francisco would save more than \$200,000 annually, which would be reinvested in pretrial staffing, alternatives to detention, and related support services. Other San Francisco strategies include increasing early termination for eligible probationers and conducting additional analyses to determine the point(s) in the criminal justice system where disproportionate minority representation arises.

Notes

1. For more information on JRI, visit www.bja.gov/JRI or email justicereinvestment@urban.org.
2. Other drivers identified included large and unmanageable probation caseloads, lengthy probation or jail sentences, citizen complaint cases, and disproportionate incarceration of minorities.
3. Todd D. Minton and Daniela Golinelli, "Jail Inmates at Midyear 2013 – Statistical Tables" (Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2013), <http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=4988>.

About the Authors

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Bureau of Justice Assistance
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