

Because of a severe economic downturn, states have been forced to curtail spending, including correctional spending. State revenues are predicted to stay considerably below their pre-recession level. Correctional responses being contemplated or implemented by states include institutional changes, “back-end” strategies and “front-end” strategies.

The proposed research will address the recent financial situation of states with regard to corrections; tradeoffs being made in funding other governmental and social services; initiatives and policy changes instituted; why these strategies have been selected; challenges in implementing change; whether strategies are consistent with best practices for ensuring public safety and offender rehabilitation; estimated short term impact on the numbers of incarcerated offenders, institutional performance and other measures, public safety, and correctional expenditures; and how to measure the long term impact on crime, including costs and benefits.

We will address these issues through a survey of the 50 state correctional administrators. We will also collect data on each state's degree of fiscal stress over the past five years and the unique contribution of corrections to that stress. Public domain data for this analysis will be taken from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) Deaths in Custody Reporting Program, the BJS National Corrections Reporting Program, and the Census Bureau Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages. We will then conduct site visits to ten correctional agencies and to three or four prisons in each of the ten jurisdictions to identify the full set of strategies that correctional agencies use to respond to fiscal pressures and evaluate their immediate impact on facility operations.

Data from all these sources will allow us to use techniques to assign a ranking (from poor to excellent) for each strategy's potential for maintaining public safety. We will then use quantitative econometric analyses to examine the short-term impacts of policy changes to address budget shortfalls, and develop a protocol for long-term and cost-benefit analysis.

The study will document the extent to which different institutional, "back-end," and "front-end" strategies are being tried by states across the country. Findings will be published in final report that will provide a comprehensive overview of the project and a detailed description of the project design, data, and methods; a full presentation of scientific findings; and a thorough discussion of the implications of the project findings for criminal justice practice and policy in the United States.