

Standard Recidivism Proposal

Recidivism is “the most commonly used definition of correctional success, is one example of a performance measure that many states use.”¹ Understanding the importance of a common definition, in 1997 the legislature tasked The Washington State Institute for Public Policy with creating a common definition of recidivism. WSIPP determined that “a recidivism event is any offense committed after release to the community that results in a Washington State court legal action.”² WSIPP has used this definition while studying recidivism rates of sex offenders, adults who released from prison, or to know the impact a program has on recidivism, like a prison treatment program or community notification. The work of WSIPP is directed by the legislature so their studies are ad-hoc and look only at the specific population in the legislature’s request.

The Department of Corrections has also completed a few recidivism studies with a focus on people who have released from prison. While that is informative, it leaves out a large population, those who received a jail sentence.

The Problem

Washington does not have an agency or any dedicated personnel providing recidivism data for the state on a regular basis.

According to the Urban Institute, it is important to routinely collect and analyze recidivism data “to examine system functioning, effectiveness, costs, and trends. Recidivism also represents a critical area of interest for criminal justice stakeholders, elected officials, prospective funders, and the general public.”³

The Oregon Statistical Analysis Center, located in the state’s Criminal Justice Commission, releases a recidivism report twice per year for the entire state. The report breakouts out recidivism data in many different ways, including age, gender, race, county, and risk level. There is also an interactive, online recidivism dashboard for criminal justice stakeholders and members of the public to use. Information at the county level is especially interesting.

A Solution

Create a research position that focuses on the state’s recidivism. This position will develop and run regular recidivism reports and conduct ad hoc analyses to better understand specific recidivism questions. The Statistical Analysis Center is an ideal organization for housing such a research position.

The Washington State Statistical Analysis Center

In 1989 Former Governor Booth Gardner authorized the SAC with Executive Order 89-03. There are currently SACs in 51 states and territories, and these are supported by the Justice Research and Statistics

¹ King, R. & Elderbroom, B. (2014). *Improving recidivism as a performance measure*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

² Barnowski, R. (1997). *Standards for improving research effectiveness in adult and juvenile justice*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy. Document No. 97-12-1201, page 2.

³ Measuring recidivism at the local level: A quick guide. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. Retrieved from: https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/recidivism-measures_final-for-website.pdf.

Association and the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The SAC conducts and publishes objective, policy-relevant research and analysis on justice issues, provides technical assistance, and maintains a clearinghouse of state justice-related data. SAC studies have examined recidivism and post-release employment rates of Washington property offenders, compared mental health and substance use disorder treatment needs of Medicaid enrollees booked into jail, examined perceptions of sex offenders and sex offender policies within the state, and explored education and workforce outcomes of youth who have had one or more truancies, to mention a few. The SAC has coordinated some of its work with other agencies, such as the Education and Research Data Center (ERDC) located within OFM, DSHS-Research and Data Analysis division, and the Washington State Center for Court Research.

Being located within OFM, the state's central management agency and as the governor's budget, research, and policy office, the SAC is uniquely positioned to facilitate, implement and coordinate an integrated approach to research for justice-related programs in the state.

In 2015, the SAC was awarded funding from the Bureau of Justice Statistics for a three-year Special-emphasis Capacity-Building Project. Part of this funding allowed the SAC to partner with the ERDC to develop a new justice data warehouse similar to the ERDC's P20W data warehouse (P20W data warehouse has longitudinally-linked data from early learning, K-12 education, K-12 discipline, higher education, and workforce data). In addition to the Jail Booking and Reporting System data, the justice data warehouse has added prison admission data from DOC, court data from AOC, and sentencing data from the Caseload Forecast Council. All the records in the justice data warehouse will be linkable with the P20W data, thus providing a data-rich source for studies. In September 2018, the SAC was awarded another three-year Bureau of Justice Statistics grant that will build upon the work started under the 2015 award.