

Appendix A : Second Chance Act Grantees: What You Need to Know to Ensure Your Program Is Built on Principles of Effective Practice

The primary objective of the Second Chance Act is to reduce recidivism. A review of the most rigorous juvenile justice research has established eight key principles and practices associated with reduced recidivism rates and improved outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system.

- 1. Target Higher-Risk Youth Offenders.** Prioritize supervision and services for juvenile offenders who are at higher risk to reoffend. Consistent findings from research show that supervision and services focused on lower-risk offenders produce little if any positive effect on recidivism and can even increase the recidivism. Maximum benefit is gained only when resources are directed to higher-risk youth offenders.
- 2. Address Youth Offenders' Greatest Criminogenic Needs.** Youths' criminogenic needs—dynamic risk factors that are the primary drivers behind youth's delinquent behaviors, such as antisocial tendencies, negative peer groups, dysfunctional families, and substance use—have proven to exert the most significant impact on recidivism. Supervision and services that address individual youth's specific criminogenic needs and that are tailored to youth's strengths and address their barriers to learning and motivation to change are likely to produce the largest recidivism reductions.
- 3. Objectively Assess Risks and Needs.** The use of validated assessment instruments has proven the most reliable, objective way to identify youth's risk of recidivism, criminogenic needs, and responsivity to treatment. The results from risk and needs assessments, in conjunction with mental health and substance abuse screening and assessments, should be the primary contributing factor in determining how to match youth to the supervision levels and specific services most likely to reduce recidivism.
- 4. Employ Effective Services.** Cognitive behavioral interventions that help youth change the thinking patterns that contribute to delinquency and to develop the skills to make more pro-social decisions have proven to substantially improve youth outcomes. Effective service approaches for youth also seek to strengthen parenting skills and youth-family interactions and to connect youth to other positive adults, peers, and activities in their schools and communities.
- 5. Coordinate Services Across Systems.** The majority of youth in the juvenile justice system have significant mental health, substance use, education, and/or child welfare needs and are already involved in one or more of these service systems. Juvenile justice initiatives can work in partnership with these other systems to assess and comprehensively address youth's criminogenic needs and improve service access, quality, and efficiency.
- 6. Engage Families and Youth.** Families are critical to youth's success. Juvenile justice systems should engage youth's families and other positive adults in case planning, supervision, and services while youth are in confinement and throughout the reentry process. In addition, youth are more likely to comply with supervision and services if they have opportunities for expression and meaningful participation in shaping case plans, decisions, and services.
- 7. Supervise Youth in a Developmentally Appropriate Manner.** Supervision officers who motivate and support youth to change through cognitive behavioral and motivational

approaches can play a key role in addressing their criminogenic needs. Supervision and accountability practices should also emphasize incentives and restitution, employ graduated responses to noncompliance, and ensure swift, certain, and proportional consequences when needed.

- 8. Prioritize Implementation Quality and Evaluation:** Close fidelity to evidence-based programs and practices produces the largest effects on recidivism while poor fidelity can result in limited or even negative effects. A system of implementation standards, the ongoing assessment of program quality including ensuring youth receive the proper “dosage” of services, improvement processes, such as ongoing training and coaching, and data collection and outcome evaluation activities can facilitate high implementation quality and achieve expected results.