

# NIC Training Needs Assessment on Community Restorative Justice: Summary of Findings

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Survey conducted by the NIC Information Center in cooperation with the NIC Academy,  
Longmont, Colorado  
June 1997

Through a survey distributed in April 1997, the NIC Information Center studied the training and technical assistance needs of agencies interested in community restorative justice (CRJ) approaches. The study also examined agencies' level of involvement in CRJ. The information was sought to support the development of NIC training to be provided in FY 1998. Surveys were distributed to 157 agencies providing community corrections services, 29 state corrections agencies (DOCs) without a community corrections division, 92 member agencies in NIC's Large Jail Network, and 32 victims' services agencies identified in the 1996 membership directory of the Victim--Offender Mediation Association.

## In This Document

Profiles of the Response Sample. . . . .	1
Current Levels of Agency Involvement . . . . .	2
Priority of Survey-Identified Training Needs . . . . .	3
Respondent-Identified Training Topics . . . . .	5
Critical Needs . . . . .	6
General Comments. . . . .	9

## Profiles of the Response Sample

158 survey responses were received, representing an approximate 50 percent response rate. Three profiles of the survey sample show the following breakdowns:

- **Judicial vs. executive agencies**—49 respondents from judicial system agencies, 97 from executive agencies, and 12 from victims' services/mediation agencies that research staff guessed to be non--governmental, non--profit organizations.
- **Agency functions**—42 respondents from sheriff's departments, 15 from state--level DOCs without community corrections responsibility, 15 from victims services/mediation agencies, and 86 from community corrections agencies (including state DOCs providing both institutional and community--based services).
- **Geographic area served**—67 state agencies, 73 county agencies, 5 district--level agencies, and 13 local agencies.

## Current Levels of Agency Involvement

Currently exploring CRJ concepts	54 respondents
Unfamiliar with community restorative justice (CRJ) concepts	40
Familiar with CRJ concepts, but no interest in adopting them	15
Participating in an operating CRJ system	14
Considering participation in CRJ	14
Currently developing a CRJ system	13
Has decided to participate in CRJ	9

Corrections agencies participating in an operating system—

- Local or county agencies: Pinal County Superior Court, Arizona; San Bernardino Sheriff's Office, Orange County probation, and Humboldt County probation, California; Las Vegas Metro Sheriff's Department, Nevada; Deschutes County, Oregon.
- State--level agencies: California Youth Authority parole and community corrections services; Pennsylvania DOC; South Dakota judicial system.

Corrections agencies that have decided to participate in CRJ system—

- Local or county agencies: Yuma County adult probation, Arizona; Ventura and Tulare County probation, California; Chautauqua County probation, New York.
- State--level agencies: Connecticut DOC, community services division; Missouri DOC; Washington DOC, division of community services.

Corrections agencies currently developing systems—

- Local or county agencies: Maricopa County probation, Arizona; San Francisco County sheriff's office, California; Florida circuit court probation, Palm Harbor; Atlanta corrections department, Georgia; Hennepin County community corrections, Minnesota; Multnomah County, Oregon; Shelby County corrections, Tennessee; Harris County community supervision, Texas.
- State--level agencies: Colorado judicial department; Missouri DOC, probation and parole.

## Priority of Survey--Identified Training Needs

Among the 21 training topics identified in the survey instrument, 5 received the most interest from the overall response pool:

- Establishing/maintaining community involvement and partnerships—82% of respondents
- Funding and resources—68%
- Defining and implementing CRJ processes—65%
- Involving offenders in the sanctioning process—62%
- Developing strategies for working with victims—60%

Training needs were fairly consistent across the three categories of corrections agencies surveyed but different for the victims' services agencies:

- Community corrections respondents ranked community involvement and partnerships first, followed by funding and strategies for working with victims.
- State DOC respondents gave equal ranking to community involvement, funding, and defining and implementing CRJ processes.
- Jail--based respondents ranked community involvement and partnerships first, followed by equally--ranked funding and defining and implementing CRJ processes.
- Respondents from victim services agencies emphasized funding, defining and expanding restorative sentencing and activity options, and community involvement and partnerships.

Overall scores for each topic listed on the survey instrument follow:

### Category 1. System design and implementation

	Number of Responses	Percent
Funding and resources	89	<b>68%</b>
Defining and implementing CRJ processes	85	<b>65%</b>
Evaluating the system/establishing performance measures	75	<b>57%</b>
Defining mission & goals	71	<b>54%</b>
Defining and expanding restorative sentencing and activity options	65	49%
Managing CRJ programs and processes	57	44%
Addressing resistance within the justice system	47	36%
Meeting statutory requirements/promoting enabling legislation	43	33%
Establishing a system for communications/ information exchange/MIS	41	31%
Leadership	36	27%

Category 2. Community factors

	Number of Responses	Percent
Establishing and maintaining community involvement and partnerships	107	<b>82%</b>
Maintaining good community and public relations	74	<b>56%</b>
Addressing resistance in the community	53	40%

Category 3. Crime victim factors

	Number of Responses	Percent
Developing strategies for working with victims	79	<b>60%</b>
Providing for crime victim response and participation in the sanctioning process	70	<b>53%</b>
Providing services to crime victims	53	40%
Understanding trauma and the dynamics of victimization	51	39%
Keeping crime victims informed	46	35%

Category 4. Offender factors

	Number of Responses	Percent
Involving offenders in the sanctioning process	81	<b>62%</b>
Involving offenders' families	75	<b>57%</b>
Working with specific offender groups (e.g., women, minors, sex offenders, mentally ill offenders)	70	<b>53%</b>

## Respondent--Identified Training Topics

Respondents suggested the following additional topics for training. By survey category, they include:

### Category 1. System design and implementation

- Integrating effective treatment interventions
- Initial and periodic needs assessment
- Potential conflicts of interest between victims' services and justice agencies
- Treatment standards
- Training for community advisory boards
- Interagency collaboration

### Category 2. Community factors

- Balancing political involvement and sound practice
- Community involvement for funding, e.g., involving churches
- Community input into program design
- Community group conferencing based on the New Zealand model
- Identifying measurable benefits to the community, e.g., providing data relevant to recidivism
- Operating community sanctioning boards
- Community education and awareness; community input into program design
- Outreach to specific groups, e.g., gays, disabled persons, the elderly
- Collaboration between the justice system and schools

### Category 3. Victim factors

- Involving a demographically representative pool of victims
- Obtaining funding to make CRJ available throughout a state

### Category 4. Offender factors

- Understanding offender needs
- Monitoring long--term progress
- Involving prison--confined offenders in CRJ processes
- Offender education about CRJ

## Critical Needs

Survey respondents were asked to identify one critical area of need. Several main themes emerged:

- Program design: mission, models, pilot programs, best practices.
- General training about CRJ philosophy, goals, and approaches.
- The need for funding.
- Educating the community, justice system agencies, the media; marketing CRJ.

Minimally edited responses follow, grouped by agency type:

Critical needs identified by community corrections agencies—

- How best to start the dialog between the community (including victims) and “probation.” Right now, both parties seem to feel awkward when approaching each other.
- Information on the CRJ concept, including goals, activities, and performance measures.
- Demonstrating programs that have worked with serious adult offenders. We have used CRJ only with first--time juvenile offenders with less serious offenses.
- Although we support the concept of restorative justice, we remain underfunded and unable to complete our current mission. Funding remains our greatest need.
- Victims are dissatisfied with the system and often ignored. We need assistance in how to involve both the community and the victims in a open, meaningful dialog.
- Funding for local corrections is always a problem. How about equal stature or at least access to the COPS \$\$ in the Crime Bill?
- Promising practical applications of RCJ concepts in correctional agencies—what's out there? What works? Technical assistance from practitioners operating successful systems.
- Integration of community policing, community prosecution, community courts, probation, and sentencing practice (circle, mediation, etc.).
- Provide descriptions of existing projects and practices of other paroling authorities that target and/or benefit the community or crime victims
- We are particularly interested in ensuring probation supervision practices are appropriately designed to enhance victim safety—especially in sex offense and family violence cases.
- Restorative justice is typically applied to low--risk property offenders. Does it have any applicability for the thousands of more serious criminal offenders on probation?

- Talking through models of effective CRJ and helping participants create a planning and action strategy in their home communities.
- Respond to political rhetoric to “get tough on crime”; host public officials at a forum on CRJ.
- Overcoming resistance to change; politics; turf issues; fear; and accountability.
- Providing us with the technical assistance to reach out to the local governing areas, i.e., city and county governments to explore this concept jointly and steer a common course that facilitates participation by our local criminal justice system and neighborhood groups.
- Provide a package that could be plugged in to a community corrections program—possibly a how--to/step--by--step comprehensive start--up plan for agencies to integrate; provide a program template that outlines established policies and practices.
- Evaluation; training; and sentencing options.
- Maintaining and strengthening staff enthusiasm.
- We need much better public information resources. We do not seem to be doing a good job of informing the public of all we do.
- Media understanding, not just 30 seconds of misinformation.
- Establishing and maintaining trust with victims, community.

Critical needs identified by jails—

- Three are critical: training for advisory board members; evaluation; creating appropriate sanctions.
- Model programs, including results.
- Educate agency on CRJ and its benefits; sponsor a pilot program here.
- We have no information on CRJ concept(s).
- Not sure agencies that have only incarcerative programs can participate; CRJ seems best suited to agencies with a continuum of care or services.
- Agency would be best served with an overview of CRJ to determine whether, how and to what extent it can/should establish such programs, practices, policies.
- Need a clear description of CRJ. Agency already has juvenile mentorship, victim impact panels, support groups, victim notification, etc.

- The need to mesh this program into existing programs (e.g., intermediate sanctions, day reporting). Our county system does not wish to start another program.
- Conduct training involving participation by all components of the criminal justice system: corrections, prosecutors, defense, courts, victim advocacy groups, etc.
- It is not clear that the concepts of CRJ, which may work well in an area where communities are small and integral and the program is being implemented statewide, would be as effective in a large and diverse jurisdiction such as ours. I do not believe we could ever introduce these concepts in a comprehensive way—better to try one little piece at a time. Your ideas on how this could be done would be helpful.
- Establish policies, practices, etc., system--wide in a community, not just in one agency (i.e., police but not prosecutor, courts)
- Share “best practices” from jurisdictions which have successfully implemented CRJ; provide information & possible networking with other jails that have programs in place.

Critical needs identified by DOCs—

- Information management related to restorative processes. As yet, no infrastructure exists to provide for necessary communication to support a serious effort.
- We are at a very early stage and need help developing a rational and prioritized phase--in of CRJ in the statewide system. Initial focus would probably be on pilot projects.
- Defining and expanding restorative sentencing and activity options.
- Define CRJ programs, develop them, implement and evaluate them from the ground up.

Critical needs identified by victims' services agencies—

- Funding and fundraising training, marketing and partnership building with dominant non--restorative justice nonprofits with greater support and access to litigation funds.
- Evaluation; statistics to collect; best practices for communicating success.
- Meeting people doing this in a similar community so we can learn from them/together.
- How to approach the massive change of the traditional judicial mindset? How to build it from the ground up? Can it work piecemeal in a state?
- Working with the criminal justice system, especially the prosecutor's office and the victims' advocacy community
- Ways to raise community awareness and change attitudes toward restorative justice.



## General Comments

Comments from community corrections agencies—

- CRJ would first require enabling legislation. Procedures could best be implemented at local levels of government. Any state DOC role is speculative.
- We especially want details on VINE.
- Our problem: extremely limited resources.
- We are acutely aware that traditional approaches are not working.
- The department is too overworked to begin developing a CRJ approach.

Comments from jail respondents—

- I would think that any agency would be concerned about how CRJ is effective in also meeting the public's desire for safety. How can the public and the elements of the criminal justice system be assured they are safe even though this is a non--transitional model? Can a politician win re--election if this is a model they support for their communities?
- Agency is doing some community oriented policing that has aspects of CRJ; interested in learning more.
- If our agency had a non--incarcerative component (community supervision or even work release/halfway house program), we'd consider participating in a system of CRJ.
- Agency has six to eight forms of victim/community restoration programs in operation.
- Not sure how CRJ would work in a jail setting.
- County thinks financial accountability of offender for damages is very important.
- Agency doesn't have the manpower.
- Our county criminal justice system has some resistance to programs supporting mediation between victims and offenders. Plus, there is no evidence so far that many victims want interaction with offenders. If victims ask for mediation, there is statutory support to help them get it, if the offender is also willing.

Comments from DOC respondents—

- CRJ models are in relative infancy. There needs to be more focus on philosophical basis and empirical data on its success.
- The DOC isn't the proper place to begin CRJ. It needs to begin with local communities with input from the state's court system and legislative system.
- Too early in the process to tell how important some of the factors are or will be.

Comments from victims' services agencies—

- Most of our effort is in juvenile justice area.
- We would like to get local pilots underway in Texas.
- Principles of restorative justice are not well understood in the larger system.