



NEBRASKA CENTER FOR
JUSTICE RESEARCH



2025

Annual
Report

Table of Contents

Executive Snapshot.....	4
Letter from the Director.....	5
About NCJR	6
Mission Statement.....	6
Facilities	6
Statement of Goals	6
Research, Evaluation, and Technical Assistance Portfolio	7
Courts.....	7
Adult Court Assessment	7
Veteran Court Assessment	7
Corrections.....	8
Nebraska Department of Correctional Services Evaluation.....	8
Lancaster Jail Forecasting	8
Minnesota Level of Service/Case Management Inventory.....	8
Washington Offender Needs Evaluation	9
Reentry	10
Vocational Life Skills.....	10
Douglas County Intensive Outpatient Program-Social Work	10
Public Safety.....	11
Nebraska Department of Transportation.....	11
National Institute of Justice Juvenile Reoffending.....	11
Funding and Resources	12
Total Budget Breakdown from Fiscal Year 2015-2025.....	12
Contracts and Grants from Fiscal Year 2015-2025.....	13
Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Breakdown	13
Partnerships and Engagement	14
Meet the Team — Staff	15
Meet the Team — Graduate Assistants.....	16
How to Engage NCJR.....	18

Executive Snapshot

This report summarizes center activities conducted during the 2025 calendar year, with financial information reported on a fiscal-year basis (July 2024 to June 2025) in accordance with university and state requirements.

Throughout the past year, the Nebraska Center for Justice Research (NCJR) secured nearly \$1.5 million in active research funding and advanced projects across courts, corrections, reentry, and public safety. NCJR researchers produced 12 scholarly publications and completed several major projects, including evaluations of the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services' Violence Reduction and Anger Management programs, the Vocational and Life Skills Initiative, the Iowa Risk and Needs Assessment evaluation, and the PRINS risk assessment validation project. Additional work on correctional classification, overcrowding, and evidence-based programming provided agencies with research-based information to guide policy and practice.

These efforts were supported by a total of 18 staff members and graduate researchers and strengthened through partnerships with more than 20 agencies and organizations across Nebraska and beyond. Key collaborators included the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services, Nebraska Court System, Nebraska Department of Transportation, Nebraska Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, Douglas County Department of Corrections, Lancaster County, Minnesota Probation System, Washington Department of Corrections, Metropolitan Community College, ReConnect Inc., RISE, O.NE Mentoring Academy, and numerous community-based organizations.

Evaluations of projects such as the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services' Violence Reduction Program and Anger Management High-Risk/Need program provided insight into program effectiveness and implementation, while studies on correctional classification and overcrowding helped agencies better understand population management challenges. NCJR also continued to advance risk and needs assessment research through the development and validation of tools designed to support decision-making in correctional settings. Together, these efforts reflect NCJR's commitment to conducting research that addresses practical challenges and supports evidence-based practices across justice systems.

Letter from the Director

Researchers face increasing competition for funding, shifting sponsor priorities, and growing expectations to demonstrate public value and measurable impact. These challenges are real, but they also provide an opportunity to reaffirm why our work matters.

At NCJR, our mission remains unchanged: to use rigorous research, evaluation, and technical assistance to help policymakers, practitioners, and communities make informed decisions that improve public safety, reduce recidivism, and strengthen opportunities for successful reentry. In a time when resources are constrained and public trust in institutions is increasingly important, evidence-based decision-making has never been more essential.



This year, NCJR continued to expand both the breadth and impact of its work. Our team conducted research and evaluation projects across courts, corrections, reentry, and public safety systems. We strengthened long-standing partnerships throughout Nebraska while developing new collaborations that extend our reach beyond the state.

One of the most exciting developments this year has been the continued growth of our work in new substantive areas. Through our partnership with the Nebraska Department of Transportation, NCJR is advancing fair and safe traffic stop practices through research, training, and statewide collaboration. We also expanded our work in court assessment and specialty court evaluation, supporting efforts to strengthen the effectiveness and equity of Nebraska's justice system.

Our influence now extends well beyond state borders. NCJR researchers are leading projects with partners in Minnesota, Washington, and numerous states participating in our National Institute of Justice-funded juvenile reoffending study. These collaborations reflect the national reputation our faculty, staff, graduate assistants, and community partners have built through years of methodological rigor, innovation, and commitment to public service.

As we look ahead, I remain optimistic. The challenges facing higher education and research are significant, but so is the demand for high-quality evidence to address complex social problems. By remaining focused on our mission, investing in strong partnerships, and maintaining the highest standards of scientific integrity, NCJR will continue to serve Nebraska and contribute to more effective, equitable justice policies.

Thank you for your continued interest in, and support of, our work. We are honored to partner with agencies, organizations, and communities across Nebraska and beyond as we work together to create safer communities, stronger systems, and better outcomes for all.

Ryan Spohn, Ph.D.

Director

Nebraska Center for Justice Research

About NCJR

Mission Statement

The Nebraska Center for Justice Research's (NCJR) mission is "to develop and sustain research capacity internal to the State of Nebraska, assist the Legislature in research, evaluation, and policymaking to reduce recidivism, promote the use of evidence-based practices in corrections, and improve public safety." Our research focus is to use data, research, and evaluation to reduce recidivism, promote the use of evidence-based practices, and improve public safety in Nebraska with an emphasis on reducing prison overcrowding.

Facilities

The Nebraska Center for Justice Research (NCJR) occupies approximately 720 square feet of dedicated office and research space within the College of Public Affairs and Community Service (CPACS) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The center's staff and graduate research assistants are co-located within CPACS and the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, providing access to university research infrastructure, computing resources, meeting space, and faculty expertise. NCJR also benefits from its proximity to the Community Engagement Center, which supports collaboration with community partners and policymakers across Nebraska.

Statement of Goals

NCJR is a non-profit research entity housed at the University of Nebraska at Omaha's College of Public Affairs and Community Service. The team is comprised of social science researchers who strive to serve the residents of Nebraska with honor and integrity by producing scientific studies held to the highest ethical standards. In pursuit of this overarching goal, we:

-  Conduct examinations of justice-related issues for the state of Nebraska.
-  Continue our national reputation as a top-tier research and evaluation center by ensuring our deliverables are produced with the utmost methodological rigor.
-  Propose and conduct scientific evaluations of policies and activities of Nebraska state agencies to assist them to serve Nebraskans efficiently and effectively.
-  Provide the public and the legislature with regular reports regarding our activities.
-  Contribute to the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice's graduate program by funding students via applied research projects.
-  Promote sustainability of statewide justice reinvestment activities.
-  Increase research credibility by producing usable technical reports and meaningful academic publications.

For more information visit: justiceresearch.unomaha.edu

Research, Evaluation, and Technical Assistance Portfolio

Courts



Adult Court Assessment

The Adult Court Assessment project examines court decision-making, case processing, and case outcomes to determine how courts operate in practice and whether these processes align with principles of equity, efficiency, and evidence-based policy. This work focuses on identifying patterns in judicial decision-making, case progression, and overall system performance across jurisdictions.

NCJR serves as the research and evaluation partner, conducting analyses of court operations using administrative data and system-level indicators. This includes examining case flow, workload distribution, and resource allocation across judicial districts. Statewide analyses of Nebraska's court system highlight variation in judicial need and capacity across districts, reflecting differences in population size, case volume, and resource demands. These structural factors play an important role in shaping case processing and decision-making practices within courts.

At the time of this report, analyses are ongoing. Findings will provide further insight into decision-making patterns and case processing, with findings to be presented in forthcoming deliverables.

Veteran Court Assessment

The Veteran Court Assessment project evaluates a specialty court designed to support justice-involved veterans through structured supervision and access to treatment and support services. As a form of problem-solving court, the program emphasizes rehabilitation, accountability, and successful reintegration into the community.

NCJR serves as the research and evaluation partner, assessing program implementation, service delivery, and participant outcomes. This includes examining eligibility criteria, referral pathways, participant engagement, and program completion outcomes, as well as broader indicators such as compliance and recidivism.

Evidence from Nebraska's broader problem-solving court system suggests that these types of interventions can significantly reduce recidivism risk. Over a three-year period, participants in problem-solving courts demonstrated an average reduction in risk to reoffend of approximately 51% at program completion. In addition, these courts operate at substantially lower daily costs compared to incarceration, highlighting their value as cost-effective alternatives within the justice system.

At the time of this report, data collection and analysis specific to the Veteran Court project are ongoing. Findings will assess program effectiveness, service delivery, and participant outcomes, with results expected in forthcoming reports.



Corrections

Nebraska Department of Correctional Services Evaluation

NCJR conducts a multi-year evaluation of programming within the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS), including violence reduction programming, anger management interventions, iHELP/oHELP programs, and electronic monitoring initiatives. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess whether programs are implemented as intended and whether they contribute to outcomes related to behavioral change and recidivism reduction.

NCJR serves as the primary evaluation partner, responsible for designing and implementing both process and outcome evaluations. Process evaluations include site visits across NDCS facilities, interviews with correctional staff and administrators, engagement with program participants, and direct observation of program delivery. Outcome evaluations involve the analysis of participant-level administrative data, including the use of comparison groups where appropriate to assess program effectiveness.

Lancaster Jail Forecasting

The Lancaster Jail Forecasting project examines jail population trends within Lancaster County to better understand factors contributing to population fluctuations and potential overcrowding. This work supports broader jail assessment and forecasting efforts aimed at improving system planning and resource allocation.

NCJR serves as the research partner, supporting analysis of jail population data and broader system trends. This includes examining patterns related to bookings, releases, and length of stay, as well as identifying factors that may influence fluctuations in the jail population over time.

At the time of this report, analyses are ongoing and may contribute to data-informed forecasting.



Minnesota Level of Service/Case Management Inventory

This project involves validation of the Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (LS/CMI) for use in Minnesota probation systems. The goal is to assess the performance and applicability of the tool within the jurisdiction and ensure that it accurately predicts recidivism risk across populations.

NCJR serves as the research partner responsible for conducting validation analyses of the LS/CMI risk and needs assessment tool. This work includes examining predictive accuracy, assessing performance across demographic subgroups, and ensuring that the tool functions as an equitable and reliable measure of recidivism risk. The tool is designed to support supervision and case management decisions by identifying criminogenic needs and risk factors within probation populations.

Washington Offender Needs Evaluation

This project involves the revalidation and updating of the Washington Offender Needs Evaluation (ONE) tool used by the Washington Department of Corrections. The work focuses on assessing the validity of the existing tool and supporting the development of an updated version using jurisdiction-specific data.

NCJR serves as the research partner responsible for revalidating and updating the ONE assessment tool. This includes examining the predictive validity of the tool and supporting efforts to align assessment outputs with appropriate programming and intervention strategies. The ONE tool is grounded in Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) principles and is designed to match individuals to interventions based on identified criminogenic needs while identifying gaps in available programming and services.



Reentry

Vocational Life Skills

The Vocational and Life Skills Program was created by Nebraska Legislative Bill 907 in 2014 and is administered by the Nebraska Department of Corrections. The goal of the program is to support individuals who have been incarcerated by providing access to a wide range of services, with primary objectives of reducing recidivism and increasing employment outcomes.

NCJR serves as the research partner, evaluating and monitoring the program, ensuring it meets the guidelines outlined in LB 907. The VLS grantees in the 2025 calendar year include Associated Builders and Contractors, Center for People: Opening Doors, Different Approach, Mental Health Association, O.NE Mentoring Academy, Metropolitan Community College, ReConnect Inc., RISE, The Work Lab, Western Alternative Corrections - Bristol Station, and Ybor.

Douglas County Intensive Outpatient Program-Social Work

The Recovery Therapeutic Community Intensive Outpatient Program (RTC IOP) is an evidence-based treatment program that uses individual and group therapy to help adults with both substance use and mental health issues in Douglas County successfully reenter the community. With NCJR serving as an external evaluator, the program tracks performance by analyzing screening data and participant outcomes from approximately 5,000 inmates at the Douglas County Department of Corrections. Some of the key partners of the RTC IOP program include the Douglas County Community Mental Health Center (CMHC) and the Douglas County Department of Corrections (DCDC).



Public Safety

Nebraska Department of Transportation

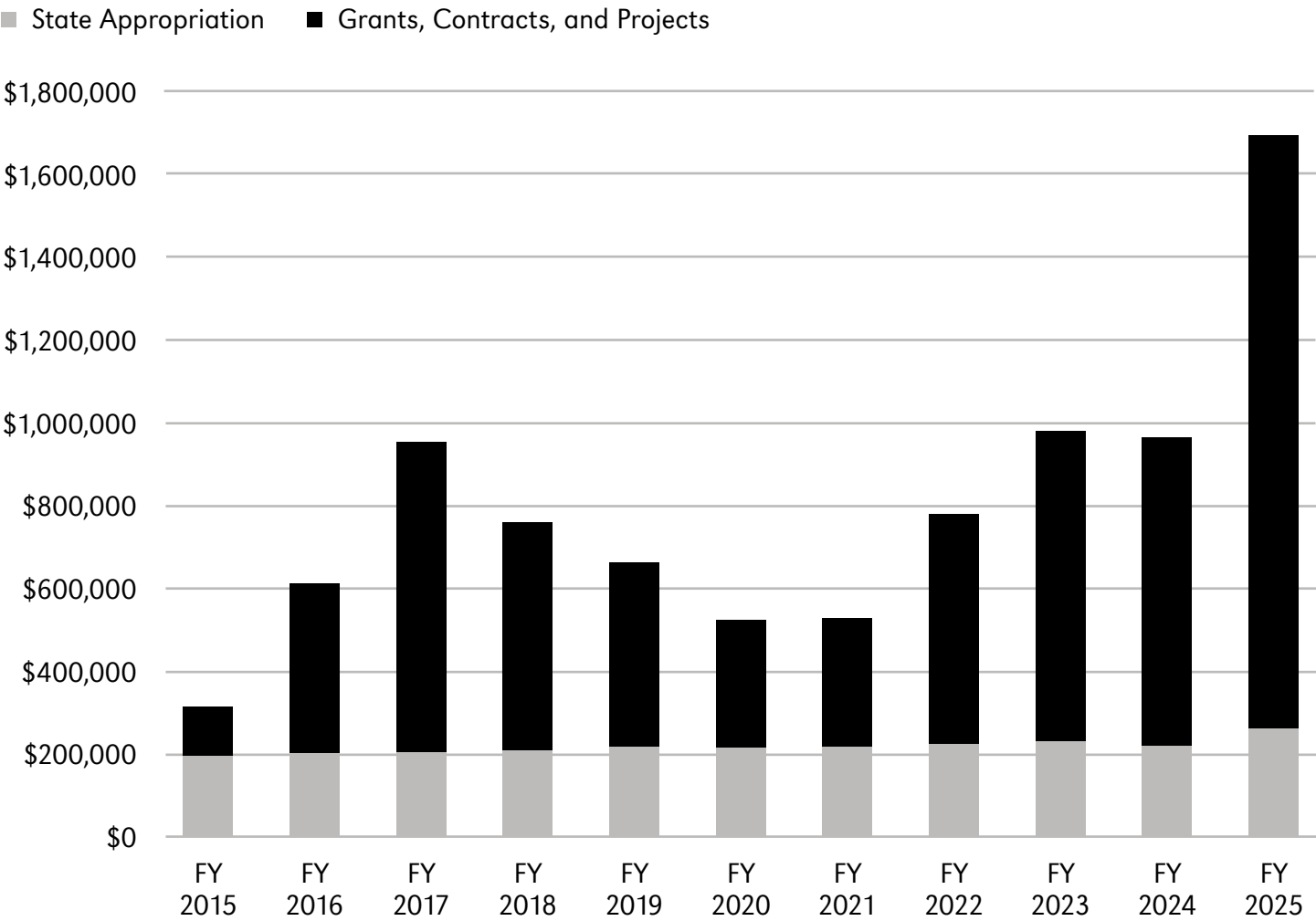
The Nebraska Department of Transportation Highway Safety Office (NDOT-HSO) project implements the Connecticut Model for researching and understanding traffic stop outcomes in Nebraska. It supports an Advisory Board, secures and analyzes traffic stop data from the Nebraska Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice (NCC) using multiple benchmark tests, and develops strategies to reduce discrepancies across officers and agencies through training sessions and model policies. The project builds on findings that identified systematic differences among agencies, with certain groups being stopped at disproportionately higher rates. NCJR serves as the lead implementing organization, working with criminal justice agencies, coordinating partners, leading the Advisory Board, coordinating outside experts, organizing training, and conducting research. The scope of the work includes hosting a statewide traffic stop database, conducting data infrastructure, stop-pattern, and police training needs assessments, and leveraging the Advisory Board to support high-needs agencies.

National Institute of Justice Juvenile Reoffending

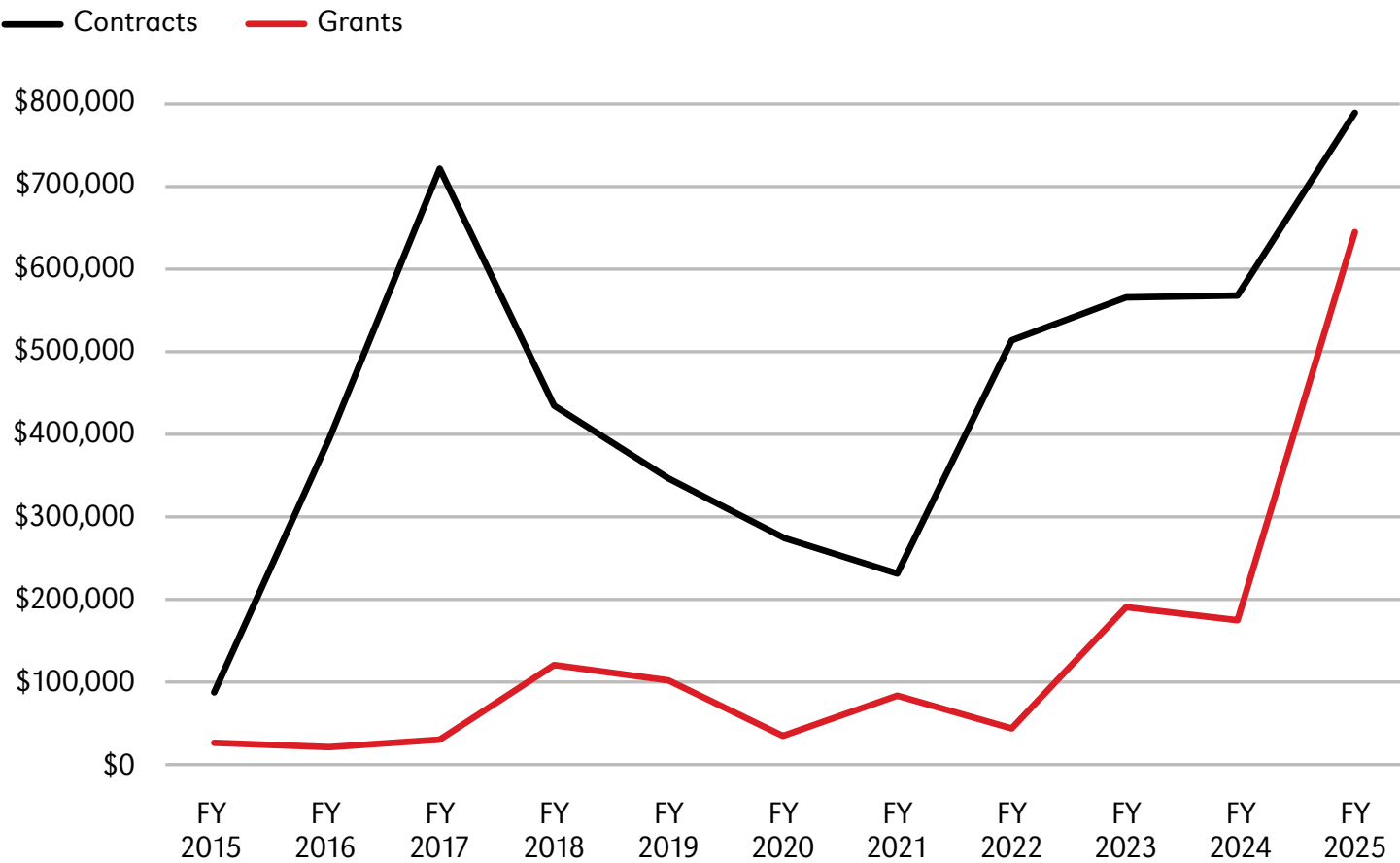
The Multi-State Assessment of Juvenile Reoffending project aims to identify factors that predict juvenile reoffending and explore variations by demographics, family structure, offense types, as well as geographic region. NCJR is the lead organization, in charge of data collection from 15 states, statistical analysis, training, co-developing a software system that can help support and improve decision-making in the criminal legal system, as well as dissemination of findings. The scope of work includes collecting and analyzing risk-needs assessment data, identifying policies, practices, and factors that influence reoffending outcomes, and supporting agencies through software development, toolkit creation, and training.

Funding and Resources

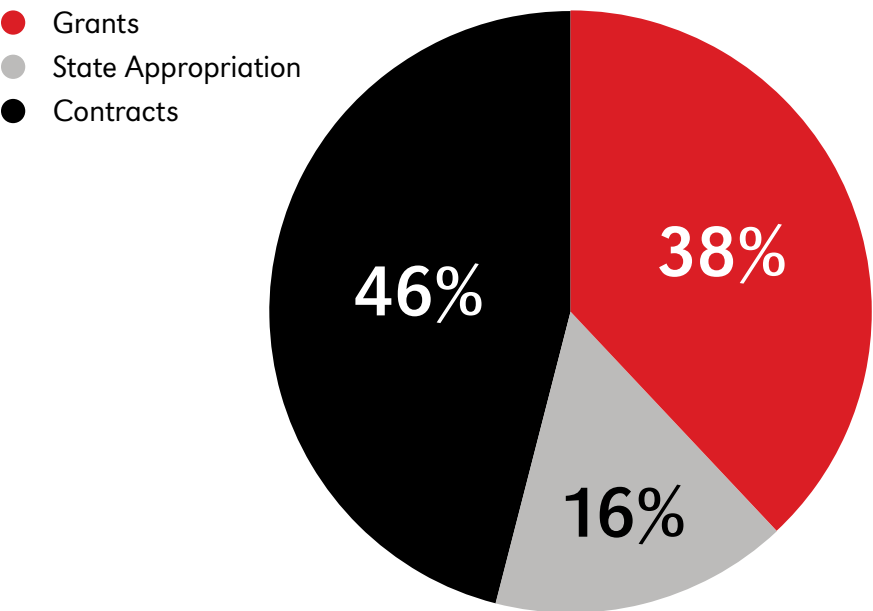
Total Budget Breakdown from Fiscal Year 2015-2025



Contracts and Grants from Fiscal Year 2015-2025



Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Breakdown



Partnerships and Engagement

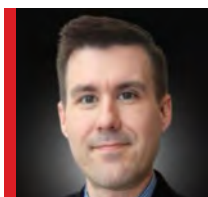


Meet the Team — Staff



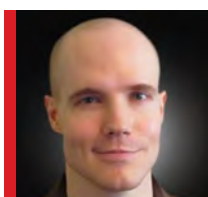
Ryan Spohn, Ph.D., Director

Ryan is the director of NCJR. He received his B.S. in sociology/criminology from Kansas State University (1996), M.S. in sociology from Texas A&M University (1998), and Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Iowa (2003). His areas of research include juvenile delinquency, crime, families, child maltreatment, and the evaluation of criminal justice agencies and programs.



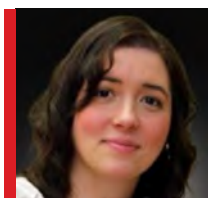
Zachary Hamilton, Ph.D., Associate Director

Zachary is the associate director of NCJR and is an associate professor in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He received his Ph.D. from Rutgers University. His research areas include risk and needs assessments and corrections.



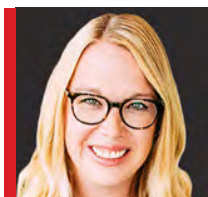
Alex Kigerl, Ph.D., Senior Research Specialist

Alex is a senior research specialist for NCJR. He received his M.S. in criminology and criminal justice in 2010 and his Ph.D. in criminal justice and criminology from Washington State University in 2014. His areas of research include risk and needs assessment, corrections, and cybercrime.



Katelynn Towne, Ph.D., Senior Research Specialist

Katelynn is a senior research specialist for NCJR. She earned her B.A. in sociology from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (2011), and both her M.A. (2014) and Ph.D. (2019) in sociology from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She is a mixed-methods evaluator with research expertise in criminology, policing, victimization, reentry, and social inequities.



Julie Garman, Ph.D., Research Specialist

Julie is a research specialist for NCJR. She is a qualitative and mixed-methods researcher with experience in policy and program evaluation, treatment courts, hospital-based violence intervention, and special populations in corrections. She earned her Ph.D. from the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2021.



Addison Kobie, Research Specialist

Addison is a research specialist for NCJR. She is an applied researcher specializing in risk and needs assessments, gender and racial equity in correctional classification, and juvenile justice. She earned a Ph.D. from the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2026.

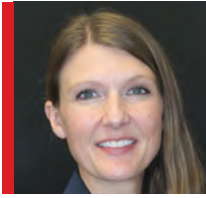


Cheryl Christiansen, Staff Associate

Cheryl is a staff associate at NCJR, where she manages the organization's budgets and provides administrative support to directors and specialists. She began her career at UNO in 2008 when she joined Dean's Office in the College of Information Science & Technology and later joined the Biology department. She holds an Associate of Arts degree from Metropolitan Community College.

Report prepared by Tara Grell, public communications and creative coordinator,
University of Nebraska at Omaha Center for Public Affairs Research

Meet the Team — Graduate Assistants



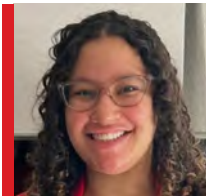
Miranda Adams

Miranda Adams earned a B.S. in criminology and criminal justice, with a minor in sociology, from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and is currently pursuing a M.A. in criminology and criminal justice. Drawing on her professional experience in law enforcement, her research interests include women in policing, organizational culture, leadership, workplace dynamics, and institutional factors contributing to attrition within law enforcement agencies.



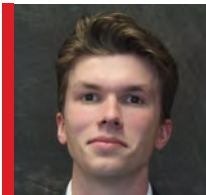
Baylee Allen

Baylee is a doctoral candidate who is currently examining the impacts of decarceration policies on those who remain incarcerated. She has accepted an assistant professor position at DePaul University in Chicago for the fall of 2025. She enjoys knitting, quilting, and playing with her Corgi, Boo.



Sarah Al Falatah

Sarah is a doctoral candidate in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her research interests include mental and physical health, violence prevention, and rehabilitation. Sarah loves to travel, read, and play games with her friends.



Jordan Cline

Jordan is a master's student in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. His research interests include policing, procedural justice, and policing technology. Jordan loves his home state, Kansas, reading philosophy, and eating good food.



Abby Hayes

Abby is a doctoral student in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her research interests include corrections, prison subcultures, and rehabilitation programs for offenders. Abby likes to travel, walk her dog, and watch Kansas City Chiefs games with friends and family in her free time.



Emily Linehan

Emily recently earned her master's degree in criminology and criminal justice from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, where she is currently continuing her education to complete a second master's degree in clinical mental health counseling. She also holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her research interests include sexual violence and correctional mental health.



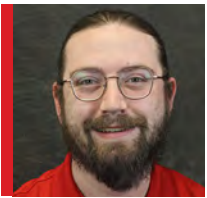
Amana Quaye

Amana is a graduate student in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her research interests include criminal justice reform, reentry, and the underlying social factors that shape justice outcomes. Outside of her academic work, she enjoys spending time with loved ones and in nature.



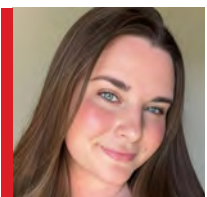
Naya Russell-Coprach

Naya is a doctoral student at the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her research interests are corrections, community and police relations, and theory. Naya loves being around family, her dog PJ, and enjoying the sun.



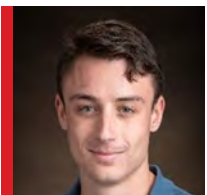
Dakota Schroll

Dakota studies individual differences in criminal propensity, specifically biopsychosocial correlates of past, present, and future criminality in all age groups. He is currently a doctoral student in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and will start as an instructor at Wayne State College in Northeast Nebraska in Fall 2025.



Kaitlyn T. Swanberg

Kaitlyn is a doctoral student in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her research interests include the sexual victimization of women and children, specifically online sexual exploitation. Outside of school, she volunteers for the National Sexual Assault Hotline through RAINN.



John Ursino

John is a doctoral student in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. His work focuses on program evaluation, risk-needs assessment, prison population dynamics, and correctional policy.

How to Engage NCJR

Whether you are a state agency, county program, foundation, or community organization, NCJR is built to partner with you. We work with practitioners to design rigorous, useful research and evaluation tailored to your needs.

1

REACH OUT

Contact NCJR by email or phone to introduce your project, agency, or research question. There is no formal application - a conversation is the first step.

2

SCOPE & PLAN

We meet with you to understand your goals, constraints, and timeline. Together we identify the right team, methods, and deliverables to match your needs and budget.

3

PARTNER & DELIVER

We work in active partnership throughout the project - sharing findings, adapting as we learn, and delivering reports, briefs, and tools that can be put into practice.

TYPES OF PROJECT WE TAKE ON

Program evaluation

Process, outcome, and cost-benefit evaluations of correctional, reentry, juvenile justice, policing, and community programs.

Population analysis & forecasting

Modeling current and future correctional populations to support classification, capacity, and policy decisions.

Policy research & reporting

Legislative reports, policy briefs, and statewide program inventories for elected officials and agency leadership.

Risk and needs assessment

Development, validation, and revalidation of risk-needs tools tailored to your jurisdiction's population.

Strategic planning & technical assistance

Needs assessments, logic model development, performance measures, and ongoing implementation support.

Community-engaged research

Survey research, qualitative interviews, focus groups, and partner analysis in partnership with the people most affected by your work.

GET IN TOUCH

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