

Executive Summary

Phase One - Discovery

Questions, Questions, Questions

This study asks ten basic questions:

1. How will the requirements for corrections staff, and especially correctional officers, increase in the remaining years of this decade?
2. What difficulties do corrections institutions face in recruiting and retaining corrections personnel, especially correctional officers?
3. How do these difficulties vary among the states?
4. Why do some states appear to succeed better than others in recruiting and retaining corrections officers?
5. What are the root causes of these difficulties and differences?
6. What is the current demographic composition of America's corps of corrections officers?
7. From which demographic or workforce pools do the nation's correctional institutions tend to recruit corrections officers?
8. What does the future hold in store for the demographic pools from which corrections officers have been recruited in recent years?

9. How well aligned are the recruitment practices of the states with the emerging demographic realities in those states?

10. What "best" or "promising" practices can be identified among the various states as well as the Federal Bureau of Prisons that appear to enhance institutions' recruiting and retention success?

Basic Findings

- America's inmate population has grown greatly in recent decades.
- And so has the number of corrections employees. Their numbers expanded by 150% between 1982 and 1999, i.e., from 300,000 to more than 750,000. Most of this growth has been at the state level. About half of that growth is due to growing numbers of corrections officers.

There is great variation among the states with respect to:

- The number of corrections officers per 10,000 population. The number varied in 1999 from 8.4 in West Virginia to 54.5 in the District of Columbia.
- The number of inmates per corrections officer. The variation in 2000 was from 2.6 in the District of Columbia to 10.8 in Alabama.
- Turnover rates among corrections officers. The range in 2000 was from 3.8% in New York to 41% in Louisiana.
- Hiring rates (defined as the number of corrections officers hired as a percent of those on staff). That rate varied in 2000 from 5% in New York to 73% in Delaware.
- The reasons why corrections officers depart, i.e., the proportions due to resignations, retirements, and incomplete probations differ greatly among the states.
- Pay. Entry level pay for corrections officers in adult facilities in 2001 varied from \$15,943 in New Mexico to \$36,850 in New Jersey.

- High turnover rates generate pressures for constant recruitment to replace officers who have departed. System growth, due to growing inmate populations, compounds the recruitment problem.
- In the ACA 2003 Survey conducted as part of this project, most respondents in both adult and juvenile institutions reported difficulties in both recruitment and retention.

There is a problem: Many, probably most, correctional systems around the nation face serious difficulties in recruiting and retaining an adequate staff of properly qualified corrections officers. Discussions with corrections officials as well as a review of many states' corrections websites and other literature confirm that point. For various reasons, some states experience this problem more acutely than others.

- Inadequate pay for corrections officers, compared to law enforcement personnel and others recruited from the same workforce pool, is broadly blamed for the difficulties of both recruiting and retention. Poor pay was the cause most frequently cited by respondents to the ACA 2003 Survey with respect to recruiting difficulty and the second most frequently mentioned relative to retention. The same reason was often cited elsewhere as well.
- Higher pay is associated with lower turnover rates. Statistically, we find that differences in salary levels are about 50% correlated with differences in corrections officer turnover rates among the states.
- Other frequently cited causes of recruiting difficulties include burdensome hours and shift work, a shortage of qualified applicants, and the undesirable location of some corrections facilities.
- High rates of turnover among corrections officers is seen to result mainly from demanding hours and shift work, inadequate compensation, stress and burnout, wrong initial selection of candidates, compe-

tition from other law enforcement and security agencies, poor career prospects, and poorly qualified supervisors.

- High turnover rates go with tight labor markets. National statistics show that high turnover rates among corrections officers are strongly but negatively correlated with low unemployment rates.
- The consequences of difficult recruitment and retention are serious; many are mutually reinforcing. They include high replacement costs (i.e., the costs of hiring and training new staff), greater stress and burnout among officers working in understaffed conditions, more expensive overtime, shift work, inadequate and/or inexperienced staff, diminished security within facilities, and lower morale.

A survey of the demographics of America's corrections officers produced the following findings:

- They are mainly male.
- They are mainly white, non-Hispanic.
- There is considerable variation among the states with respect to both gender and ethnicity. Some states are much more diverse than others. Nationally, there appears to be a slow trend toward greater gender and ethnic diversity.
- They are mainly aged 25 to 44.
- They are moderately well educated. Approximately half have not pursued formal education beyond the high school level.
- There is a tendency for states that employ a relatively large proportion of females and minorities among their corrections officers to pay less well than other states.
- Efforts to achieve greater gender and ethnic diversity generally appears not to be happening in states that pay relatively well.

Looking ahead at the future demand for corrections officers, we find the following:

- The total number of corrections officer jobs to be filled in this decade will be very large, estimated at 490,000 in total.
- That number includes both the new jobs required by the growth in the prison population and the replacement of officers who leave the service after completion of their probationary periods.
- It seems likely that the annual number of corrections jobs to be filled in this decade will be substantially below that of the 1990s.
- The War on Terrorism dramatically alters the demand for security and law enforcement workers. It is not clear that this increased demand has been fully taken into account in the most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) occupational projections.
- Demand will be brisk in other occupations where workers share the same characteristics as corrections officers.
- The economic slowdown of 2001–2003 temporarily obscured the growth in demand for civilian sector workers that will become apparent as the economy recovers in 2004 and beyond.
- The demand for corrections officers and occupations that compete in the same workforce pool will grow rapidly in the years ahead.

From a survey of the demographics of workforce supply for America's corrections institutions, several key points emerge:

- The nation's pool of 25-44 year olds is shrinking. The Census Bureau projects it to decline by over 4 million in this decade.
- White non-Hispanics are the most rapidly shrinking demographic pool. The Census Bureau projects a drop of over 7 million between 2000 and 2010.

- Hispanics are the most significantly growing demographic group followed by Asians.
- This is equivalent to saying that the workforce pool from which many, although not all, states continually endeavor to recruit most of their corrections officers is declining.
- Despite nationwide movements toward diversity in recent decades, this diminishing workforce pool is the same one that many employers continue to favor in their recruitment practices.
- Some states have aligned their corrections recruitment practices with the emerging demographic realities much more than others.
- Those states that attempt to recruit from a familiar male, white, Non-Hispanic workforce pool, which face sharp declines in the years ahead, will confront some difficult challenges.
- These states will either need to realign their recruiting practices with demographic realities or they will need to make corrections a much more attractive employment option . . . or both.

Phase Two – Create

The Bureau of Justice Assistance stressed the importance of having deliverables in this grant beyond a report that would tell corrections professionals what they already knew, that there will be a severe shortage of qualified workers in the corrections profession in the years ahead.

When the grant was awarded, ACA immediately created two new committees to assist in developing the strategic plan. The Correctional Workforce Project Steering Committee was appointed to represent the stakeholders and associations that would be facing the workforce challenge. Those serving included adult and juvenile correctional administrators, wardens, facility administrators, labor leaders, university professors, employment professionals, and representatives from various associations. The purpose of this

group is to help identify successful approaches as well as challenges and barriers to the successful implementation of the project.

The second committee was the Human Resources Committee. This committee brings together the human resources administrators and managers in public and private correctional agencies. The purpose of this committee also is to identify successful practices that are being used to recruit and retain employees in correctional facilities. This committee is also expected to provide a profile of current human resource challenges that are being faced by correctional agencies across the country.

At the 133rd Congress of Correction in Nashville, Tennessee, the consultants and chairs of the Steering Committee and Human Resources Committee organized and presented more than 10 workshops on the ACA Workforce Project and on human resource issues confronting corrections. The workshops were very well attended.

Six more workshops were presented at the ACA Winter Conference in New Orleans in January of 2004 and at the 134th Congress of Correction in Chicago.

In a year and a half, nearly 20 workshops had been presented that addressed the challenges of recruiting and retaining a qualified and diverse workforce and presented successful practices that have been implemented in correctional agencies to overcome the challenges. Following every conference, committee members and consultants carefully reviewed the feedback from participants and identified successful strategies that participants had noted. Additional subject matter for future workshops was also provided by the conference participants. This information was compiled in a

notebook format that was shared with the committee members, ACA staff, and consultants.

Over the two years of the project, several workshops were given at various state and regional correctional conferences on the project.

Phase Three – Implement

With the information provided in the Discovery Phase and input from the field through the workshops and committees' discussions, the consultants and the committees have been able to initiate specific targeted strategies. The most significant has been the publication of the August 2004 issue of *Corrections Today*, ACA's award-winning journal of corrections, that was focused on the correctional workforce. For the first time in ACA's 134-year history, twelve articles from experienced individuals in and out of corrections focused on various aspects of the corrections workforce. It is estimated that *Corrections Today* has a readership of over 60,000.

In addition, the Human Resources Committee has created an on-line newsletter directed to human resources professionals in correctional agencies and facilities. *InfoLink* is provided at no cost to anyone wishing to receive the document electronically. In some cases, hard copies have been provided.

These resources have provided valuable information to correctional agencies on successful practices in the recruitment and retention of qualified correctional workers.

When the final report is delivered to the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Discovery Phase Report will be available to the field on the ACA website.

The Implement Phase continues through the ACA's leadership and through the efforts of the Steering Committee and the Human Resources Committee.

What Next?

As with any challenging project, the deeper one drills down, the more one finds that needs to be done. Additional priorities include:

- ✦ The establishment of a clearing house to gather real time information on the correctional workforce. Corrections cannot wait another 35 years to call attention to the importance of finding and keeping a qualified and diverse workforce. Changing demographic trends alone necessitate that one organization be charged with the responsibility of collecting and analyzing information from the Department of Labor and juvenile and adult correctional agencies across the nation.
- ✦ Further work is needed in focusing on specific positions in correctional facilities. Health care workers, teachers and counselors are in great demand in the free society. How much more will the demand be in correctional facilities?
- ✦ Identifying specific, successful, strategies focused on the recruitment and retention of women and minorities and on correctional leadership development was barely touched on in this project. Much more needs to be done.
- ✦ ACA is considering a special section on the Association's website for workforce issues.

The ACA Professional Development Department is studying the feasibility of a specialized correctional professional certification for human resources administrators, managers, and supervisors.

In Closing . . .

The American Correctional Association wishes to extend its deepest appreciation to the Bureau of Justice Assistance for its generous support of this project and for sharing the vision of the importance of the correctional workforce in the years ahead.