



Survey of Pretrial Programs Series: Organizational Structure

PJI has recently released the fourth national survey of pretrial services programs. Previous surveys were conducted in 1979, 1989, and 2001.

Listed below are the findings relating to the kinds of communities pretrial programs serve, and how the programs are administered.

More Programs Serve Multiple Localities

The number of programs that serve multiple localities has grown since the 2001 survey. Results show that 21 percent surveyed in 2008 serve multiple localities, typically two or three counties in a particular region, compared to 10 percent in the 2001 survey. The number of programs that serve a single jurisdiction dropped from 88 percent in 2001 to 78 percent in 2008. Kentucky is the only to report providing pretrial services statewide.

Programs Serve Larger Jurisdictions

Less than half (40 percent) of the programs in the 2008 survey reported that they served jurisdictions with populations between 100,000 and 500,000. About one in four programs reported that they served populations of 100,000 or less, about the same as both the 1989 and 2001 surveys. In 2008, more programs (35 percent) served populations of 500,000 or more, than in 2001 or 1989. In 1989, 32 percent of pretrial programs served a population of 500,000 or more and in 2001, 29 percent did. The increase in population growth reflected in the 2008 survey may explain the increase in staff size of pretrial programs.

Most Programs Serve a Mix of Urban, Suburban and Rural Communities

Forty-nine percent of the pretrial programs in the 2008 survey categorize the area served by their programs as a mix of urban, suburban, and rural. Another 19 percent serve primarily urban communities, 21 percent of programs serve primarily rural areas, and 11 percent of programs serve primarily suburban areas.

Many Programs Are Relatively New

Nearly half the programs participating in the 2008 survey began operating after 1990, including 15 percent that have begun since 2000.



More Programs Are Housed in Probation Departments

Since the first programs were established in the 1960s, pretrial services programs have been housed in a variety of administrative locations. Programs have been located in probation departments, the court, the sheriff's department or jail administration and private, nonprofit organizations. The NAPSA Standards state that pretrial services programs "should have a governance structure that provides for appropriate guidance and oversight of the agency's staff in the development of operational policies and procedures and for effective internal administration of the agency or program" (Standard 3.7(a)). Although the standards do not provide specific guidance about what the governance structure should be, it is stressed that the "governance structure...will help ensure the requisite of neutrality" (Commentary to Standard 3.7(a)).

The share of programs run by a probation department has risen consistently. In the 1989 survey, 24 percent of pretrial services programs were run out of probation departments. In 2001, that number rose to 31 percent, and to 38 percent in 2008. The percentage of programs run by the sheriff's department or jail administration, which had experienced an upward trend across the prior three surveys, appears to be declining slightly. In 2008, 16 percent were housed in the sheriff's department or jail administration, down from 19 percent in 2001. There continues to be a movement away from having pretrial programs administered by the courts – 22% in 2008, compared to 29 percent in 2001, 38 percent in 1989, and 35 percent in 1979. Programs housed in independent agencies went from eight percent in the 2001 survey to 14 percent in 2008. In 2008, the share of programs housed in private, nonprofit organizations appears to be leveling off at eight percent.

