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Attached please find the Executive Summary for the *Evaluation Report of the NYC Justice Corps: The Final Report of Year One Implementation*. Funded by the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity, the NYC Justice Corps is an ambitious demonstration initiative that seeks to change how communities address the reentry of young people from the criminal justice system. Specifically, the NYC Justice Corps aims to develop the capacity of neighborhoods to address the reintegration challenges of their young adults and instill in those young adults a sense of civic responsibility and accountability to the communities to which they return.

Metis Associates authored the Evaluation Report which offers a comprehensive account of the program's launch and development from contract execution in July 2008 through the first nine months of the program's launch (through June 2009). It also identifies challenges faced by the program which informed how we have continued to refine the model. As noted in the Evaluation Report, many of the lessons learned and recommendations for improvement have been incorporated into the NYC Justice Corps program model and operational policies for the second program year, which started in September 2009.

The Evaluation Report offers insights into an initiative that is innovative and complex in design and ambitious in scale. It represents a snapshot of the program's initial 12 months of operations. The first three months covered in the Report were dedicated to project start-up. Much of the program's operational policies were developed and refined during the first nine months. Since the time of this Report's drafting, five additional full months of programming and services have been provided to approximately 95 of the 276 Corps members enrolled in the program.

We hope the Executive Summary and full Evaluation Report advances the field of prisoner reentry and future efforts of youth development and community capacity building. Findings from the NYC Justice Corps outcome evaluation—random assignment experimental design which will assess the NYC Justice Corps' impact on long-term employment and criminal justice outcomes, in addition to the program's impact on the communities it serves—will be available late 2012. For more information about the NYC Justice Corps, please do not hesitate to contact either one of us or to visit our website at [www.nycjusticecorps.org](http://www.nycjusticecorps.org).

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# **Evaluation of the NYC Justice Corps**

## **Final Report of Year One of NYC Justice Corps Program Implementation EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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**WESTAT/METIS**

## Acknowledgements

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This is the final report of the evaluation of implementation of the NYC Justice Corps' first year. Over the past year we have been greatly assisted by many individuals. We would like to express our thanks to all those who have contributed to the evaluation effort.

Through their involvement, project sponsors, program staff, and community stakeholders have demonstrated a commitment to improving the life prospects of young people and a dedication to creating and testing a new program model that will impact not just these Corps members but the community at large. We would like to thank Deborah Mukamal, Ali Knight, Anna Crayton and Amelia Thompson of the Prisoner Reentry Institute of John Jay College and Vaughn Crandall and Brent Cohen of the NYC Department of Correction for their guidance and support for the evaluation. The program and the evaluation would not have been possible without funding and support from the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity.

Staff of the convener organizations graciously made time for the evaluation despite the daily pressures that come with starting a new and complex program. We are grateful to Dorick Scarpelli, Rosemary Ordonez-Jenkins, Talia Nagar, and Libby McCabe, and all of the staff at Phipps Turning Point, and to Tracey Capers and John Edwards, and all of the NYC Justice Corps program staff at Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation for opening their doors to us.

The Center for Employment Opportunities staff helped smooth the way for random assignment to occur and has facilitated the collection of data for use in the evaluation. We especially want to thank Tani Mills, Mick Munoz, and Luis Suarez.

The evaluation would not have been possible without the participation of the Corps members, themselves. Through focus groups and at observations, these young people openly shared their opinions and expectations of the program. We wish them all the best as they continue on their journeys to careers and lifelong learning. We would also like to thank those community stakeholders who shared their perspectives of the program and participants with us.

Finally, Metis staff deeply appreciates the support of Scott Crosse and Janet Friedman at Westat. The evaluation was a collaborative effort between the two organizations, and it has been a pleasure to work with them.

# Executive Summary

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## Introduction

Young people with criminal records face many challenges when they return to their communities. With limited skills and work experience, and often without a high school diploma, they are at high risk for further criminal involvement and a life of poverty. The NYC Justice Corps has been designed to address the needs of these young adults, ages 18-24, in New York City. A program such as the NYC Justice Corps was recommended by the NYC Commission for Economic Opportunity in 2006. The recommendation was adopted and the NYC Justice Corps was developed by John Jay College of Criminal Justice (the College) and the NYC Department of Correction (DOC), with funding for the program as well as the evaluation provided by the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity (NYC CEO), a unit of the Office of the Mayor established to implement innovative poverty-reduction programs in New York City.

The NYC Justice Corps is based on a civic justice corps model that emphasizes partnerships between community organizations, justice agencies, and employers and that has its roots in programs that re-engage young people with past criminal involvement in their communities through community service – civic engagement – projects. Youth and community development, crime prevention, and workforce development strategies provide the framework for the program model. The NYC Justice Corps aims to improve the short- and long-term employment, education, and recidivism outcomes of Corps members, improve the capacity of organizations to serve this population, and provide benefits to the community.

The NYC Justice Corps was established in 2008 in two NYC communities – Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn and the Melrose, Mott Haven and Morrisania sections of the Bronx. The program has been implemented by Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation (BSRC) in Brooklyn and Phipps Community Development Program (Phipps) in the Bronx. The Center for Employment Opportunities (I-CEO), an organization that provides employment services to formerly incarcerated individuals, has served as an intermediary organization, providing technical assistance and capacity-building services, as well as data and start-up fund management and performance monitoring. The program is administered by John Jay College with the involvement of the NYC Department of Correction, and support from staff of the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity.

The evaluation of the NYC Justice Corps conducted by Westat and Metis has been designed to assess the implementation and effect of the program on participants and on the target communities. This implementation evaluation, which relied on multiple evaluation methods (interviews, focus groups, observations, and analysis of program data and documentation) covers the period through the program's first year that ended on June 30, 2009 during which four cohorts at each site moved through the program. A fifth cohort was recruited in the Bronx toward the end of June; as this occurred after data collection for this report was concluded, information about this cohort is not presented.

The outcome evaluation, which will assess short- and long-term outcomes, including the program's effect on employment, education, and recidivism, utilizes a rigorous random assignment design. The outcome evaluation also includes an assessment of program costs and impact on the NYC Justice Corps communities.

This report covers the origins, development, and implementation of the various aspects of the program. Implementation topics include the program's structure, strategies and services provided, characteristics and views of Corps members, views of community stakeholders, and an assessment of fidelity to the program model, convener capacity and role of the intermediary, challenges and lessons learned, and whether the program is on-track to achieve its outcomes.

Key findings are summarized below in the following sections: development of the model, program start-up and development, recruitment and enrollment, characteristics of participants, program implementation, and assessment.

## **Development of the NYC Justice Corps Model**

**The NYC Justice Corps model builds on the work of civic justice corps that has developed around the country over the past decade.** Building on this work, program planning was conducted over an 18-month period that involved meetings with city agencies, advocacy groups and other organizations, and formerly incarcerated individuals. Additional changes to the model were made based on lessons learned from an initial unsuccessful competitive bidding process, as well as from a second bidding process. This latter process resulted in contracts with two convener organizations to implement the program in designated communities of Brooklyn and the Bronx, and a third organization to serve as intermediary. The program was not implemented in the third community (Jamaica, Queens), as planned, because of a lack of interest on the part of community organizations.

**The program model consists of recruiting and enrolling young people ages 18-24 year olds, who had been involved in the criminal justice system within the past year, and providing them with a six-month program experience.** Criminal justice involvement was defined as being on parole or probation, in an alternative to incarceration program, or released from prison or jail within the past year. It is important to note that conviction of a crime was not a condition of program enrollment and an individual may be acquitted after spending time on Rikers Island (New York City's jail facility) or referred by an alternative to incarceration program without having been convicted. Program phases were defined as orientation and life skills/job readiness training (1 month), community benefit service projects (3 months), internships (6 weeks), and placement in unsubsidized employment and/or education.

**The program was designed to serve Corps members in cohort groups.** The evaluation included a rigorous random assignment design in which individuals were randomly assigned either to a group which received program services (JCP) or a referral (JCR) group which did not receive any services but was provided with a list of other potential programs. The cohorts were designed so that the young people entered and moved through the program as a group, in order to promote positive interactions and relationships among Corps members.

## Start-up and Development

**The basic guidelines and features of the program model were set prior to beginning services, but many aspects continued to be developed, and this first program year should be considered a year of program development as well as implementation.** Policy guidelines, for example, concerning eligibility and random assignment, were developed by the College in consultation with DOC over the summer of 2008, before Corps members were recruited. Guidelines continued to be developed as issues surfaced during the year. I-CEO, with the support of the College and DOC developed protocols related to various aspects of the program and each convener developed its own operational policies and program materials. The College and DOC continued to closely oversee and guide all aspects of the program and the evaluation throughout the year.

**Delays in contracting resulted in a postponement of the original program start dates from the spring to the fall of 2008 and resulted in a compressed time frame for site hiring, training and planning.** The compressed planning period also resulted in the postponement of random assignment in Brooklyn until the second cohort but also meant that the Bronx began recruiting its first cohort with the added burden of random assignment. In addition, although the program was always designed to serve a rolling set of cohorts, the shortened program year meant that, at times, site staff had to serve Corps members from two cohorts in the same phase at the same time, which strained staff supervision and space.

## Characteristics of Participants

**The Corps members were a demographically diverse group.** Participants were about equally divided into under and over 21 age groups, with some cohorts skewing toward the higher age group. Each cohort was majority male, but the percentage of females was just over 20% in one cohort. Black, non-Hispanic youth were the large majority at the Brooklyn site, but Hispanics/Latinos represented 30-40% of Bronx participants. With only a few exceptions, the Corps members resided in the program's catchment areas.

**The large majority of Corps members had not completed high school or earned a GED.** The proportion of high school completers (diploma or GED) ranged from just under a fourth to one-third of each cohort.

**Across the cohorts, a majority of Corps members are under parole or probation supervision.** While most participants reported at the time of enrollment that they had been convicted of a crime once, some had never been convicted. As noted above, conviction was not a requirement for program eligibility.

## Program Implementation

**After experience with their initial cohorts, both conveners arrived at effective recruitment strategies and an optimum interval between recruitment and program enrollment.** With the exception of Cohort 1 in Brooklyn, program staff were required to recruit more than double the number of eligible applicants for the random assignment process, and they were largely

successful. In fact, BSRC exceeded recruitment and enrollment targets for three of the four cohorts, and was just shy of the targets in the remaining cohort. The random assignment process was modified mid-year to provide for the assignment to the two groups in proportion to the number referred by source: probation, parole, and all other (including alternative-to-incarceration program referrals, community referrals, etc.). This change eliminated initial disparities between the number of individuals referred by a particular source and the number enrolled in the program, and helped to keep these channels open for future referrals. At the same time, a two-week interval was determined to leave sufficient time to reach out to referral sources and ensured that referral data were current. Community referrals and word-of-mouth increased as the program became better known.

**Phipps and BSRC followed the program model yet they modified how they implemented various phases as the first cohorts reached each new phase and as staff gained experience working with subsequent cohorts.** Phase 1 activities, including orientation, life skills, job readiness and service learning, became more interactive. And, as it became apparent that Corps members would not be job-ready after three or four weeks, they shortened this phase and added job readiness activities so that participants could have a better transition from community benefit service projects to internships and so that they would be better prepared for their internships.

**A belated emphasis (in the start-up phase) on greater youth involvement in the process of identifying community benefit service projects created challenges for program implementation; it limited staff's ability to plan ahead and required staff to learn how to temper participants' expectations when their project ideas were not selected for presentation or did not work out.** It took time for the sites to achieve a process that balanced a desire to engage and empower the youth while also developing viable projects and keeping to a tight schedule. Using guidelines and a process developed by the College and DOC, the sites also developed community advisory boards and implemented a process for engaging board members in project selection.

**It took time for the conveners to understand and develop the technical skills that were required to plan and scope the community benefit service projects.** I-CEO senior site supervisors were critical to the development of this aspect; they provided technical assistance to conveners' staff on how to estimate the resources (cost and materials) needed, and determine the feasibility of projects, and added the supervision of the projects to the work they did for their own organization. To maintain an acceptable staff to participant ratio on projects, the sites supplemented their own staff with consultants, such as supervising artists for the mural projects.

**Implementation challenges encountered in the sequencing and duration of the community benefit project and internship phases have led to some changes to the program model for the second year.** The changes provide the option to provide a shortened community benefit project phase in order to provide Corps members with more intensive job readiness services before the start of internships.

**The sites addressed the need for educational services first by referring Corps members to GED programs and, when that was not successful, by bringing such services on-site, although that was not part of the NYC Justice Corps model.** As this is a significant barrier to

successful employment, the College has added educational services to the program model in Year Two.

**Data on the first two cohorts indicate that it was a challenge for Corps members to be placed in and complete internships, and/or graduate from the program (which required either completion of an internship or placement in postsecondary education or employment).** Staffs of both programs reported that Corps members needed more preparation and support than the model initially anticipated. BSRC and Phipps used somewhat different strategies for developing internships and job placements, with BSRC striving to identify internships that would convert into permanent job placements, viewing internships as an opportunity for Corps members to try out a job they might like on a permanent basis, while this was not a strategy used by Phipps.

**Program retention was high: just over 70% of the Corps members who began the program in Cohorts 1 and 2 completed six months of engagement, a rate that is higher than the average rate of retention in other youth corps programs that serve a demographically similar population, and not necessarily one with criminal justice system involvement.**

**Many performance targets were met or exceeded.** At the time of this report, data on post-program placement was available only for the first two cohorts at each site and none met this target. The recent downturn in the economy should not be ignored as an obstacle to permanent job placement.

## **Convener Capacity**

**The conveners and their staff brought a variety of experiences that were applicable to elements of the program, but were faced with the enormous complexity of the program model.** And while the conveners may have served some individuals with criminal justice history, neither had experience with the criminal justice system nor with a program targeted exclusively to this group. Learning about the NYC Justice Corps model and about the needs of the target population had to occur while in the process of providing each phase of the program. Refinements of each phase of the program continued over the course of the program year while post-program retention strategies were still being developed.

**BSRC and Phipps each took different approaches to organizing and staffing the program, with Phipps developing a “contained” program with staff assigned full-time and its own program space and BSRC developing a “blended” structure that used full-time staff as well as staff from other units assigned part-time or as needed.** While staff assignments by Phipps were clear, the amount of time that various BSRC staff were spending on the program was difficult to assess since this varied over the year and was described differently by different staff. It is too early to say whether, in the long run, the blended staffing model offers advantages in terms of sustainability, but it did create challenges for the Brooklyn site this first year.



## Role of the Intermediary

**I-CEO, serving as an intermediary organization between the contract administrator (the College) and the conveners, had multiple responsibilities for the NYC Justice Corps, including coordinating services, providing technical assistance and capacity-building services, auditing performance, managing start-up funds, working with referral sources, sharing information, and coordinating data management and ensuring reporting.** Guided by the College and DOC, they worked on the development of every aspect of the program. Yet, the many hats worn by I-CEO staff, in particular their management and auditing functions, created a barrier to being readily accepted by convener staff as a TA provider.

**I-CEO staff played an important role in shaping the implementation of community benefit service projects.** This included defining the types of projects that were acceptable, gauging their feasibility, estimating the resources that would be needed, and providing support to convener staff.

**A combination of time pressure and various decisions led to compromises in program data that impacted the timely availability and quality of the data for cross-site analysis and use in the implementation evaluation.** A reliance on two different data systems, each with different system limitations, and a disparity in how various data fields were defined by each site, made cross-site comparisons difficult. Furthermore, although Phipps, with in-house support, was able to maintain quality control, there were internal inconsistencies in the BSRC data. These challenges have led the College to assume responsibility for data management in Year Two.

## Assessment

**Within the flexibility that was offered to conveners during this first program year, the main features of the NYC Justice Corps have been implemented as planned.** The conveners, with the support of the College, DOC, I-CEO and NYC CEO, have implemented a brand new program in two communities with great needs. They have successfully recruited a significant number of participants – more than twice the number of eligible applicants they could serve. The conveners have developed staff capacity through training and technical assistance provided by I-CEO and other organizations. With the assistance of I-CEO and DOC they have developed relationships with criminal justice agencies. They have developed and implemented curricula, identified community benefit projects with Corps member and community input, and provided Corps members with useful training and work experiences.

**The NYC Justice Corps also incorporates best practices identified in the literature.** Notably, the conveners have developed relationships with their respective communities and have established relationships with local justice agencies (parole, probation and alternative-to-incarceration programs); they offer case management and other services to help in the personal development of participants, and positive role models. The program offers a staged experience of job readiness, community benefit projects, and internships, the implementation of which has been refined for the program's second year.

**Corps members gained valuable experience on community benefit service projects and made visible contributions to their communities.** Corps members who participated in focus groups wanted a better future for themselves and their children. They appreciated that their project would have longevity in the community and that the work would be attributed to the NYC Justice Corps.

**Interviews with community stakeholders also indicated the positive opinions these individuals held about the program and the participants.** These stakeholders viewed the community benefit service projects as a constructive and positive addition to their communities and were very supportive of the work. Internship sponsors also expressed satisfaction.

**Many of the initial program performance targets have been met (e.g., recruitment, Phase 1 and Phase 2 completion for a majority of the cohorts for which data are available). And, although initial findings point to challenges in meeting internship and graduation goals, a high percentage (over 70%) of Corps members nevertheless remained engaged in the program as indicated by program (service) completion results for the first two cohorts.** Data on post-program placement outcomes are only available for the first two cohorts, but if these data are indicators of future performance, substantial challenges lie ahead in meeting program targets, especially in light of the current economic downturn. Improving and streamlining data collection and reporting remain challenges that are being addressed in Year Two. With the program entering its second year, attention will need to focus on sustainability for the long term and identification of additional funding sources.

## **Recommendations**

Based on this evaluation of the first year of implementation, we offer the following recommendations:

- *As the policy guidelines developed for the program were quite detailed and often were clarified in subsequent updates, they should be reviewed and consolidated in order to ease future implementation and program replication.*
- *The BSRC program's blended staffing configuration should be reviewed and a full-time program manager should be hired.<sup>1</sup> Lines of supervision should be clear. Further analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the two different types of staffing plans employed by the two conveners should be explored.*
- *Further analysis of the effectiveness of internship, placement, and post-placement retention strategies, should be conducted after additional cohorts have completed these phases.*
- *Data on each cohort and on the activities/services of each phase should be cleaned, analyzed, and reported back to the project partners on an ongoing basis and discussed in relation to program staff's self-assessment of implementation in order to provide*

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that BSRC hired an Operations Director was hired at the beginning of the second program year.

*information for continuous improvement and data-driven decision-making about the model.*

## **Summary of Lessons Learned and Program Revisions for Year Two**

Many lessons have been learned about how best to engage Corps members, involve the community, and meet the needs of referral sources. Some of these lessons already have led to changes that were implemented over the course of the year, while others have been incorporated by the College into program design changes for Year Two. Notable lessons and resulting program modifications are summarized below.

- A two-week interval between recruitment and participant enrollment was considered to be the optimum time frame for these initial aspects of the program.
- Ongoing communication with probation and parole officers and their departments is critical to maintaining positive relationships with these major referral sources.
- Activities need to be interactive and hands-on in order to engage Corps members.
- Attendance policies need to be clear and disciplinary policies should be progressive.
- Rather than being considered a three-week phase that leads to the other project components, job readiness became recognized as a process that occurs throughout the program. Recognizing the amount of time and effort that members needed to become job ready led to a program modification in Year Two that allows Corps members to decrease their time on community benefit service projects after ten weeks in order to prepare for internships.
- Over the course of the year the conveners learned how to balance Corps member decision-making and community input into the development and selection of community benefit service projects with the need to select projects that were feasible and within the time and resources available. Effective communication strategies (how best to communicate the purpose of these projects and the types of projects that could be accomplished so that Corps members would not be disappointed when their ideas were not selected) and a technical capacity (how to “scope” the projects to determine the skills, materials, cost, and time needed to accomplish the work) were both required and developed. Having a pipeline of projects that could be drawn upon if a particular project could not move forward and having indoor projects, in case of inclement weather, were other lessons learned.
- Even the minimal \$1 per hour contribution that was required from host internship placements was deemed a barrier to hosts’ participation, especially for government agencies. In Year Two, the contribution became an option that conveners could use to promote host buy-in but was not required.

- The initial plan of meeting the educational needs of Corps members through referrals was not successful because of scheduling conflicts, transportation issues, and issues related to participants' motivation. Pre-GED and GED classes initiated by the conveners and offered during part of the year were more effective in attracting participants. As a result, the College planned to include this important service in the conveners' operations for Year Two.
- In response to the data management issues that occurred during the first year, the College moved to take over the role of primary data manager and work toward a more centralized data collection and management approach that would more effectively meet program reporting and performance management needs.
- To create a more effective relationship for technical assistance and knowledge sharing between the conveners and the intermediary, the College planned to hire an independent auditor.
- The level at which stipends were set (\$8-9.50 per hour) and the effect they might have on Corps members' willingness to accept jobs that paid a lower wage or resulted in a lower income after taxes was a topic for discussion during the year. In consideration of these factors, the College set the stipend for the second year at between \$7.15 and \$8.50 per hour.

More will be learned as the conveners apply these lessons to the new cohorts in Year Two and continue to refine their services, as the program modifications instituted by the College take effect, and as outcome results become available.

