

JRSA Tip Sheet: BJS SAC Grants: Key Distinctions for Core vs. Special-Emphasis Capacity-Building Projects

Each year, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS)-sponsored State Justice Statistics (SJS) Program presents SACs the opportunity to submit proposals for funding within two program areas – **Core Capacity-Building and Special-Emphasis Capacity-Building**. Because it is not always obvious which program area best fits a project, this fact sheet provides additional guidance.

Core Capacity-Building subcategories of project work include:

- A. Research using incident-based crime data that are compatible with NIBRS;
- B. Collecting and analyzing data on criminal justice system processes;
- C. Increasing access to statistical data; or
- D. Other capacity building projects identified by the SAC.

Special-Emphasis Capacity-Building subcategories include:

- A. Use of utilizing administrative or operational criminal justice data; or
- B. Analysis of state criminal history records.

Further distinction between the broad SJS program areas is provided in the solicitation's discussion of requirements. The language clearly suggests that Core Capacity-Building projects are intended to address SAC-defined needs – perhaps based on criminal justice policy and practice issues of interest to their stakeholders (e.g., Governor's office, state legislature, SAC oversight boards, practitioner associations, victim advocacy leaders). The solicitation states that these

projects “must include a specific justification for each proposed project that fully explains exactly how the project will respond to capacity-building needs identified by the SAC.”

Additional SAC-centric language calls for “a long-range plan that includes (1) an assessment of the SAC's current data collection, analysis, and publication capabilities, including staff analytical capabilities; (2) a description of how the proposed project(s) will enhance those capabilities; and (3) a description of how the capacity built will be maintained after the conclusion of the SJS award.” The significance of this long-range plan is reinforced by SJS language stating that “the strength of the justification and plan will be an important consideration for BJS in making a final award decision.”

In contrast, Special-emphasis projects are to include an impact statement that describes how the project will directly support or enhance BJS and national priorities, such as:

- supporting the sharing of state-level information nationally;
- enhancing the state's capability to collect, analyze, and interpret data on criminal justice issues relevant to the states and the nation;
- supporting or enhancing specific BJS collections, improving coverage, reducing respondent burden, and/or improving or implementing uniformity across states in analytical efforts; and
- documenting if and how the state will make maximum use of state-level data collected by BJS and/or other DOJ components to conduct analyses;
- demonstrating how the resulting work will be

shared with other state entities, other state SACs, and the general public.

This national and inter-state focus is reflected as well in an SJS statement that BJS encourages collaboration among the SACs (i.e., multi-SAC projects), particularly in projects that may leverage one SAC's expertise in another SAC's proposed project to help build capacity.

Here are two hypothetical examples of projects that might seem to fall under both Core Capacity and Special Emphasis categories:

- Based on concerns from national victim advocacy groups, a SAC proposes to collaborate with two other SACs on an examination of sexual assault arrest charges vs. final court disposition charges (from criminal history records) to determine the nature of plea bargaining for sex offenders;
- A SAC proposes to create web-based graphical presentations of trends in emergency room admissions to illustrate gradual shifts in heroin overdoses from urban to suburban regions of the state, and help guide expenditures of drug treatment funds across various jurisdictions.

Applying the additional, impetus-related criteria to these examples can help determine the appropriate category. The sexual assault study example originated with policy and practice issues communicated at the national level and was carried out in a collaborative manner among multiple SACs. This would qualify the project as falling into the SJS **Special-emphasis** category. The emergency room admissions data analysis, on the other hand, was derived from state-level resource allocation concerns, and would likely fall into the SJS **Core Capacity-Building** category.

It is therefore worth considering the impetus and source of priorities being addressed in their SJS proposals as part of the process of determining the appropriate work area for funding. If additional questions arise, specific inquiries may be addressed directly to BJS program managers prior to grant submission.