



**SAFE ALTERNATIVES TO SEGREGATION INITIATIVE
Request for Proposals for Technical Assistance Sites**

Applications will be accepted until 8:00 p.m. EST, January 30, 2015.

**Application should be submitted in PDF format via email to:
rdelaney@vera.org**

Questions about this solicitation should be directed to Ruth Delaney, Program Associate, rdelaney@vera.org, (212)376-3035.

The Vera Institute of Justice (Vera), in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)ⁱ, is soliciting applications from state and/or local corrections departments seeking technical assistance with the safe and effective reduction of segregated prisoner housing. The technical assistance will be provided as part of Vera's Safe Alternatives to Segregation Initiative (SAS Initiative).

Vera's Safe Alternatives to Segregation Initiative

Segregated housing, or solitary confinement, has a long history in the US criminal justice system. A founding principal of the nation's first prison, the practice later became a strategy for handling prisoners deemed threats to the safety and security of facilities. In recent years, it has increasingly been used with prisoners who do not pose a threat to staff or other prisoners, but commit minor violations that are disruptive but not violent.

A growing body of evidence suggests that holding people in isolation with minimal human contact for days, years, or in some instances decades, is counterproductive to public safety as well as exceptionally expensive. Long-term isolation can create or exacerbate serious mental health problems and assaultive or anti-social behavior,

ⁱ *This project is supported by Grant No. 2014-DB-BX-K009 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

result in negative outcomes for institutional safety, and increase the risk of recidivism after release.ⁱⁱ Since 2010, Vera has assisted state and local departments of corrections with safely reducing their reliance on segregation.ⁱⁱⁱ

Building on Vera’s expertise and with support from BJA, Vera is launching a Safe Alternatives to Segregation Initiative (SAS Initiative). The goals of the initiative are:

1. To assist states and counties in reducing their use of segregation/solitary confinement;
2. To develop, demonstrate, and evaluate alternatives to disciplinary, administrative, and protective custody solitary confinement;
3. To raise awareness across all correctional institutions nationwide, whether jails or prisons, of safe alternatives to segregation; and
4. To produce practitioner-focused guides to implementing alternative practices.

The SAS Initiative consists of three core components: (1) technical assistance to up to five state prison systems or local jurisdictions (TA Sites) that will be selected in a competitive process; (2) annual convenings of representatives from the TA Sites and an Advisory Council of expert practitioners and researchers to nurture a professional learning community; and (3) development of an online Safe Alternatives To Segregation Resource Center to provide resources and information to the field.

The following describes: (I) Vera’s technical assistance to state or local departments of corrections, (II) the competition: application requirements, and (III) selection decisions: timeline and process for selection of TA Sites.

I. Technical Assistance to State or Local Departments of Corrections

Vera will work in partnership with the selected TA Sites to: (1) assess segregation policies and practices; (2) analyze data on its use of segregation, (3) provide policy and practice recommendations for safely reducing the use of segregation and enhancing alternative responses to challenges posed by special populations, and (4) provide planning and implementation assistance to sites.

This Request for Proposals (RFP) is the mechanism by which Vera will select TA Sites. It is open to state and local corrections systems. Summarized below is (1) the

ⁱⁱ See: Venter, H. et.al., “Solitary Confinement and Risk of Self-Harm Among Jail Inmates,” *Am. J. Pub. Health*, Vol. 104, No. 3, 442-447 (March 2014).; and Lovell, D., “Patterns of Disturbed Behavior in a Supermax Population,” *Crim. Justice and Behr.* 35 (2008): 9852; Lovell, D., L. Clark Johnson, and Kevin C. Cain, “Recidivism of Supermax Prisoners in Washington State,” *Crime and Delinq.* 53 (2007): 633-656; and David Lovell and Clark Johnson, “Felony and Violent Recidivism Among Supermax Inmates in Washington State: A Pilot Study” (University of Washington, 2004).

ⁱⁱⁱ Vera has partnered with several state corrections departments, including Illinois, Washington, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania, and with the corrections department in Bernalillo County, NM.

TA that Vera will provide to selected TA Sites, and (2) the requirements for participating TA Sites.

1. **Overview of Vera’s technical assistance to selected TA Sites:** Although the specifics of analysis and assistance will vary depending on the challenges and concerns of each TA Site, the project will include, at minimum:
 - A. Initial Meeting with Leadership: Vera staff will meet with the corrections director/chief executive and his or her leadership team to understand their desired outcomes and challenges, their concerns, their goals for the project, and current system use(s) of segregation. From that conversation, Vera staff will outline what is needed in terms of access to facilities, policy documents, and data.
 - B. Initial Meeting with the Department Review Committee:^{iv} Vera staff will meet with the Department Review Committee to learn members’ views of segregation use in their facilities or units, their concerns, and anticipated challenges to implementing alternatives.
 - C. SAS Initiative Advisory Council Peer Mentor: Each TA Site will be paired with a member of the Advisory Council to serve as a peer mentor to the site throughout the project. The peer mentor will be a representative from a corrections department that has successfully reduced the use of segregation.
 - D. Policy Review: Vera staff will review agency policies on disciplinary and administrative segregation, including but not limited to: disciplinary procedures; types of and definitions of violations; disciplinary matrices and sentencing guidelines; policies on status reviews and dispositions; policies regarding out of cell time, meetings with counselors, and visits; mental health care; and policies and procedures for step-down programming, if any.
 - E. Data Analysis: Vera will analyze individual-level administrative data on all types of segregation used by the TA Site. Vera will facilitate a secure data transfer method with each TA Site. The assessment will focus on key questions: which prisoners are sent to segregation, reasons for segregation placement, length of stay in segregation, and post-segregation violations by prisoners later moved to other levels of security. Vera’s researchers will consult with the TA Site’s data staff throughout the analysis.

^{iv} See a description of the Department Review Committee in Overview of TA Site Responsibilities below.

- F. Facility Site Visits: Vera staff will tour the TA Site’s segregation, related mental health, special needs, and protective custody units at key facilities as determined by Vera and the Department Review Committee. The number of site visits conducted by Vera, as well as the facilities chosen, will be determined in accordance with the overall and specific goals of the assessment. At each facility site visit, Vera will first meet with the warden/superintendent, officers, and other security, mental health, and social work staff to learn how segregation is used in practice at each facility and the decision points for segregation placement, sentencing, and release to general population or the community. Vera will then tour relevant units with facility leadership. While on site, Vera staff will review randomly selected case files, discuss these cases with staff, and examine how segregation decisions are made. These visits allow Vera to observe conditions of confinement, talk to front-line staff, and understand the unique challenges and needs of each facility visited.
- G. Debriefings: At the end of each site visit trip, Vera staff will debrief with facility and agency leadership to ask questions, review preliminary observations, and share immediate recommendations, if any.
- H. Final Report and Meeting: Vera will meet with the Department Review Committee to discuss the results of the site visits and data analysis. After consulting with the Department Review Committee, Vera staff will draft a final report. The report will focus on key findings and strategies to safely reduce segregation, enhance alternative responses to restricted housing and special needs populations, improve conditions of confinement, and prepare for data tracking of key changes in segregation policies and practices.
- I. Implementation Assistance and Follow-up Data Analysis: Vera will provide ongoing technical assistance with planning and implementation of recommended policy and practice changes. Additional data analysis may be undertaken if it is needed. Finally, best and promising practices will be documented and disseminated for use by other jurisdictions.

The duration of the TA to sites is two years. It is anticipated that the Implementation Assistance and Follow-Up Data Analysis (step I), will begin approximately 12-15 months into the project.

- 2. **Overview of TA Site Responsibilities**: Selected TA Sites will agree to work with Vera to establish or provide the following:

- A. Department Review Committee: TA Sites chosen to participate in the SAS Initiative will be required to appoint a multidisciplinary Department Review Committee consisting of the corrections director/chief executive, as well as staff from across the agency. These committee members could include administrators, security staff, mental health providers, segregated housing unit supervisors, line staff, disciplinary hearing officers, and others who can contribute to, and will be affected by, the project. Vera will advise sites on membership. The Department Review Committee will meet with Vera staff for a project kick-off meeting, receive updates on data analysis progress, provide input on recommended policy and practice changes, and be available for consultation throughout the project. One to two members of the Department Review Committee will accompany Vera staff and the Site Coordinator on each facility site visit.

- B. Site Coordinator: Each site will be required to designate a Site Coordinator, who will serve as Vera’s primary point of contact at the site. The Site Coordinator will handle logistics related to meetings of the Department Review Committee and facility tours, facilitate requests for policy documents and administrative data related to the project, and accompany Vera staff on all facility site visits.

- C. Policy Documents and Administrative Data: Each TA Site will be required to provide Vera with all relevant policy documents and with individual-level administrative data. Relevant documents and data will be determined by Vera in consultation with the Department Review Committee and will be used to assess how the site is using segregation in practice.

- D. Representative to the SAS Initiative Advisory Council: Each TA Site will be required to appoint a representative to attend annual SAS Initiative Advisory Council meetings. The project will cover travel, lodging, and per diem costs for these meetings.

- E. Matching funds: Each chosen site will be required to provide a funding match for this project. The exact match amount will depend upon the size of the jurisdiction’s overall annual operating budget, as outlined below:

<u>Annual Operating Budget</u>	<u>Required Match Amount</u>
Under \$500 Million	\$30,000
\$500 Million - \$1 Billion	\$40,000
Over \$1 Billion	\$50,000

II. The Competition: Application Requirements

Through the SAS Initiative, up to five TA Sites will be selected to receive comprehensive technical assistance on reducing the use of segregation and enhancing alternatives to segregation. Applications will only be accepted from entire state departments of corrections or county jail systems. Applications from individual facilities within a larger department will not be considered.

The application package should include: (1) a letter of intent and commitment, and (2) an application narrative.

1. **Letter of Intent and Commitment:** The SAS Initiative is a collaborative effort, and its success depends on the commitment and engagement of the site's departmental leadership. Vera's prior experience has proven that the top-down leadership of the corrections director/chief executive is critical to achieving the goals of segregation reduction. The corrections director/chief executive must sign the letter of intent and commitment.

The letter of intent and commitment should provide a brief overview of the site's reasons for applying and goals for this effort. In addition to commitment to the project goals and objectives, the letter should also indicate the site's commitment to:

- A. Engaging and collaborating with Vera and BJA throughout the project;
 - B. Allowing Vera staff access to all information requested, including but not limited to relevant departmental and facility policy documents, individual-level administrative data, and site visits to facilities;
 - C. Providing matching funds, appointing a site coordinator, and establishing a multidisciplinary Department Review Committee and participating in SAS Initiative Advisory Council convenings;
 - D. Granting Vera and/or BJA permission to publish reports, data analysis, and other documents related to the SAS Initiative and the TA Site (review and opportunity for commentary will be provided prior to any publication);
 - E. Entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with Vera memorializing these commitments.
2. **Application Narrative:** The items listed below should be submitted as a narrative (copies of relevant documents or sections of documents may be included as attachments).
 - A. Leadership Profile: Please provide the following information about the current corrections department's director/chief executive:
 - i. Dates of his or her tenure as director/chief executive;
 - ii. His or her employment history with the Department;

- iii. His or her employment experience with other corrections departments;
 - iv. Press coverage of his or her appointment as director/chief executive, if any;
 - v. Stated reform agenda of his or her own or of the governor or county executive at the time of the appointment, if any.
- B. Overview of System: Please provide the following information:
- i. History of department leadership changes over the past ten years;
 - ii. Overall system bed capacity and population, as well as description of each facility within the system, including mission, bed capacity, population, and security levels, and implementation of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), including whether a PREA audit has occurred. If PREA audit has occurred, please indicate whether facility passed, or whether corrective action was recommended (and if so, please include the recommendations); and
 - iii. Overview of intake, screening, and classification process, including any standardized tools used.
- C. Data Indicators and Data Capacity: Please provide the following data about your system. If you are unable to provide any of the indicators below please provide an explanation why.
- i. Total number of admissions to prison or jail in 2014;
 - ii. Total number of people in custody by custody type (e.g., general population, disciplinary/punitive segregation, administrative segregation, protective segregation, other) on June 1, 2014;
 - iii. Average length of stay for people leaving segregation (into either the general population or to the community) during 2014;
 - iv. Total number of infractions in 2014 and the percent of violent infractions (violent infractions as defined in your system); and
 - v. Total number of misconduct incidents (one infraction or more) in 2014 and the percent of incidents resulting in disciplinary/punitive segregation.
- D. Reform Efforts: Please briefly describe any recent (within the past 5 years) actions related to conditions of confinement within the department. Please include:
- i. Information about any discussions with civil liberties or prisoner rights advocacy groups (e.g., ACLU, prisoner legal services agencies) regarding conditions of confinement, including discussions of potential litigation;
 - ii. A description of any litigation related to conditions of confinement wherein the department and/or employees of the department are named as defendants, including a summary of the issues litigated and outcomes of any actions. Please include information about any legal

- actions that were avoided, were dismissed, or are stayed pursuant to agreements by the department to address conditions of confinement, as well as a description of the agreed-upon terms;
- iii. Description of any legislation enacted within the past five years addressing conditions of confinement;
 - iv. Description of any legislative interest in conditions of confinement, including requests by legislators to tour facilities, legislative hearings, and campaign talking points;
 - v. Copies of any press coverage from the past year regarding conditions of confinement at any department facility.

III. Selection Decisions: Timeline and Process for the Selection of TA Sites

A team of Vera and BJA staff will review all of the proposals and make a final selection of up to five sites. Vera reserves the right to select fewer than five sites based on the quality of the applications. Decisions will be announced by March 2015.