

# STATISTICS MEMO

## *B.R.I.D.G.E. Program Continuation Review: Return-To-Prison Rates*

*April, 2010*

### **PURPOSE**

In 2009, the General Assembly ordered a Continuation Review of the Building, Rehabilitating, Instructing, Developing, Growing, Employing (B.R.I.D.G.E.) program, which is administered cooperatively by the Division of Forest Resources (NCDFR) and the Department of Correction (DOC). The B.R.I.D.G.E. program was established to provide trained and readily available firefighting personnel to assist with the suppression of wildland fire throughout North Carolina. Participants in the program are housed and screened at the Department of Correction's Western Youth Institution located in Morganton. In February 2010, NCDFR submitted a continuation review report to the General Assembly. Included in this report were results from an "...informal...study..." of recidivism rates for inmates participating in the B.R.I.D.G.E. program compared to rates "...for general population inmates of the same age group and conviction status".<sup>1</sup> The Fiscal Research Division of the General Assembly requested additional information on recidivism rates for program participants and a comparison group of inmates not assigned to the program. This memo provides statistics on the return-to-prison rates for inmates exiting in FY 2005-2006 who participated in the program and compares these rates to a matched-sample of inmates exiting in the same year who did not participate in the program.

### **DATA AND METHODS**

Computerized records in the Offender Population Unified System (OPUS) of inmates who exited during FY 2005-2006 were examined to determine if they participated in B.R.I.D.G.E. during their period of incarceration. DOC used a three-year span to measure recidivism in order to allow ample time to observe the impact of participation on criminal justice outcomes. Exiting inmates were classified into three enrollment categories for the purposes of evaluation: (1) "non-participant" is an inmate who was never assigned to the program, (2) "participant" is an inmate who was assigned to the program at some time during their period of incarceration and; (3) "dropout" is an inmate who was removed from the assignment prior to release from prison. Any subsequent return to a North Carolina prison by these inmates within three years of the exit date as found in OPUS was recorded to evaluate the return-to-prison rate.

The analysis statistically accounts for factors that may influence the individual's future criminal behavior (e.g., severity of substance abuse disorder, family and criminal history) and other factors that may also influence the inmate's selection to participate in the program (e.g., institutional infractions, medical or mental health conditions, participation in other correctional interventions). DOC evaluated the impact of the program on returns to prison using a statistical technique (i.e., propensity score matching) that considers potential differences among inmates and creates equivalent groups appropriate for comparison. This method shows whether participation in the B.R.I.D.G.E. program impacts the likelihood of a return to prison by allowing a comparison between participants and non-participants with similar risk factors. Because this technique produces a matched subset of inmates, summary statistics for program completion or alternate methodologies for determining recidivism rates may produce different figures. Return-to-prison rates were evaluated using a chi-square statistic on the matched samples of participants and non-participants.

<sup>1</sup> North Carolina Division of Forest Resources (2010). *Young Offenders Forest Conservation Program-BRIDGE: Continuation Review Legislative Report*. Raleigh, NC: Author. pp.11

## RESULTS

These statistics are based on offenders who exited prison in FY 2005-2006 and practices within the program during the time of incarceration. The data therefore, do not reflect any changes during subsequent years that may impact effectiveness. Table 1 below shows the number of offenders included in the analysis and return-to-prison rates for each enrollment category.

While the return-to-prison rates for completers (39.1%) and dropouts (43.5%) of the B.R.I.D.G.E. program were higher than non-participants (37.6%), these differences are not large enough to be statistically significant ( $p=0.7800$ ). In order to provide rates that are comparable to the NCDJR methodology, we also included return-to-prison rates one year after exit. While the return rates were lower across all enrollment categories, there is still no significant difference in return rates among completers (5.8%), drop-outs (8.7%), or non-participants (10.5%).

When evaluating the impact the program has on recidivism, the actual rate of return is substantially less relevant than whether the rates for participants (e.g., completers) are different from those of non-participants. The difference in rates of return between one year and three years (i.e., completers return-to-prison rate is 5.8% at year one and 39.1% at year three) is expected because as time increases, so does the opportunity for criminal behaviors that may lead to re-incarceration.

Based on the results of this analysis, we conclude that there is no reduction or increase in returns to prison due to participation in the program. However, because this program targets young male offenders who may have exceptional challenges re-integrating into society after release from prison, the ability of the program to impact recidivism may not be the single most important consideration of program effectiveness.

**Table 1: Return-To-Prison Rates by B.R.I.D.G.E. Participation Status: One Year and Three Years after Exit from Prison**

<b>Program</b>	<b>Number of Offenders</b>	<b>Return Rate for Non-Participants</b>		<b>Return Rate for Completers</b>		<b>Return Rate for Dropouts</b>		<b>Significant</b>
One Year	266	10.5%	133	5.8%	87	8.7%	46	No
Three Years	266	37.6%	133	39.1%	87	43.5%	46	No