



**North Carolina Office of Strategic Partnerships**  
**Research Partnership Opportunities: North Carolina Office of Indigent Defense Services**  
June 2021

**Purpose:** The [North Carolina Office of Strategic Partnerships](#) facilitates research to improve policy and program operations for the benefit of all North Carolinians. Below are partnership opportunities with the [North Carolina Office of Indigent Defense Services \("IDS"\)](#). IDS seeks assistance with its efforts to develop and publish a long-term strategic plan, which will cover an eight-year period, by December 2022.

IDS is responsible for providing lawyers to indigent defendants and others entitled to counsel in adult and juvenile criminal cases; involuntary commitment cases; abuse, neglect, and termination of parental rights proceedings; and other cases where counsel is a statutory or constitutional right. Service is provided under three delivery models: through appointment of private counsel by judges; through a state-funded public defender's office; and by private attorneys who contract with IDS.

**IDS aims to develop an evidence-based long-term plan for the provision of high quality and cost-effective indigent defense services throughout North Carolina's 100 counties.** While IDS's research department has significant data about caseloads, costs, and key performance indicators related to current delivery models, neither IDS nor its traditional partners are well-positioned to forecast future demand for services. Accordingly, IDS is looking for assistance on the following topics:

1. **Forecasting population trends by county over the next 8 years:** Which counties are expected to gain population and which counties are expected to lose population? What is the expected population of each of North Carolina's 100 counties in 2024, 2026, 2028, and 2030?
2. **Forecasting poverty rates by county over the next 8 years:** IDS is responsible for providing services to persons who cannot afford to hire counsel, and indigency rates vary from county to county. Are indigency rates expected to remain stable, or will economic development contribute to a lessening of indigency rates in certain areas of the state?
3. **Forecasting attorney availability:** Will demographic changes affect the availability of private counsel to be appointed to indigent cases? For example, how many attorneys will be seeking to practice in North Carolina over the next eight years; will there be sufficient new attorneys admitted to replace those who will retire; will economic development result in attorneys being concentrated in certain areas of the state.
4. **Forecasting crime rates in the various counties,** to the extent that can be modeled to any reasonable degree of scientific certainty. (Or, if it cannot, an explanation of why crime rates are not generally predictable).
5. **Forecasting whether changes to or advancement in technology might result in greater efficiencies in attorney time spent on casework.**

Research and data on the topics above will help IDS 1) identify which areas will be in the greatest need of service and 2) assess where expansion of the existing public defender offices or creation of new offices is most critical.

**In addition to forecasting, IDS would be interested in answers to the following questions as it assesses different delivery models:**

6. How do **jail populations** in public defender counties in NC compare per capita with jail populations in non-public defender counties? Are there differences in pre-trial release rates or in length of time for cases to be disposed?
7. Does the **availability of public defenders** to represent parents in abuse, neglect and dependency cases relate to measurable differences in outcomes in those counties (e.g., a reduction in time in foster care or an increase in number of reunifications)?
8. Is there a difference in **outcomes for juvenile offenders** between counties where defense is provided by court-appointed counsel and counties where defense is provided through contract counsel or public defenders?

**Commitment Needed:** The research needs above have different timelines; IDS may decide to pursue a partnership at any time with one or more researchers. Some opportunities will be short-term (commitment of a few months or less); others will require longer commitments. Timeframe and deadlines for completing the needs above will be determined case by case.

**Funding:** Some of the above may require funding. This will depend on the scope, level of expertise needed, and other factors. Research partners, agency officials, and the Office of Strategic Partnerships can discuss funding details, including needs and potential sources, on a case-by-case basis.

**Publication Policy:** We are committed to open science best practices, including sharing results and distributing of materials needed to replicate. This includes academic and practitioner publishing and may also include interactive online materials, community forums, podcasts, and beyond as best fit for the relevant audiences.

**Context:** The NC Office of Indigent Defense Services was created by statute and operates as part of NC state government, which serves over 10 million residents. The NC Office of Strategic Partnerships (OSP) is housed in the NC Office of State Budget and Management, which includes data-driven and evidence-based decision making among its priorities. [Click here](#) for more information on and examples of OSP's efforts to support research partnership opportunities with state agencies.

**How to Express Your Interest:** Please complete [this interest form](#). Have questions? Email [partnerships@osbm.nc.gov](mailto:partnerships@osbm.nc.gov). Depending on current needs and other considerations, it is possible that not all individuals who express interest will receive a reply.