



Increasing Options and Access for Victims of Crime

Summary Report of the National Scan of Conviction and Sentence Review Units

Overview

In instances of violent crime, case activity can continue long after a conviction, often for the duration of the convicted person's confinement or supervision within the community. However, most individuals who were victims and survivors of crime believe that a criminal conviction signifies the end of the legal process. They are often unprepared for the variety of potentially re-traumatizing case activity post-conviction, including the possibility of early release of the incarcerated individual. Increasingly, prosecution agencies are petitioning courts to overturn convictions, reduce sentences, and release individuals who are incarcerated as part of nationwide efforts to achieve criminal legal reform goals. In these cases, victims and survivors of crime are often forgotten, and their rights, as well as their need for support and services, are neglected.

The rapid increase in the establishment of conviction and sentence review units (CRUs/SRUs) within prosecution agencies at both the local and state level, along with the resulting early releases of individuals who have been incarcerated, highlights the urgent need to address post-conviction victim services. It is essential that victims and survivors from these cases do not continue to be overlooked.

Healing Justice provides direct support to victims and survivors in cases involving postconviction claims of innocence and exonerations and provides training and technical assistance in these cases to victim service providers and allied professionals. Through this award from the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), Healing Justice partnered with the National Crime Victim Law Institute (NCVLI), National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA), and Urban Institute, as well as other expert advisors and those with lived experience. Together, we seek to address the historically underserved community of victims and survivors by creating a comprehensive foundation for post-conviction victim service interventions at the national and local levels through this project.

Purpose

Over the past decade, there has been a significant increase in the number of CRUs/SRUs in prosecution agencies nationwide. A CRU conducts an extrajudicial, fact-based review of original convictions with the goal of identifying and remedying wrongful convictions. An SRU reviews cases for sentence fairness and possible adjustment, early release, or other modifications in select instances where the unit determines it serves the interest of justice.

With the support of the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), Healing Justice conducted a National Scan (Scan) to confirm the number and location of CRU/SRUs in the country as well as to define their mission, scope, and engagement of victim advocates. This Scan is built upon lists of CRUs/SRUs (hereinafter Units) nationwide created by the [National Registry of Exonerations](#) and the [Quattrone Center](#) (*Appendix B*) The information herein will help us to identify trends in post-conviction processes across jurisdictions and to determine the application of post-conviction victims' rights, post-conviction victim services models, practitioner training modules, and overarching policy recommendations developed by this project.

In conjunction with NCVLI, the Scan was supplemented by a legal analysis of specified victims' rights laws in states with Units and the implication of those rights in the post-conviction setting. Both information-gathering initiatives provide valuable data and critical insight for developing the tools, resources, training, and recommendations necessary to achieve the overall project goals for Award #15POVC-22-GK-03561-NONF.

Methods

In the Fall of 2023 and Winter of 2024, the project team conducted outreach to prosecuting agencies nationwide to gather information specific to their Units along with any related victim services. The primary purpose of this outreach was to identify the mission of each unit, the scope of the cases they handle, and which units had a dedicated victim advocate to assist them in their work. The project team developed a questionnaire to collect this information (*Appendix A*). Additionally, the project team gathered information about the units from publicly available sources.

The questionnaire was distributed nationwide to 100 Units with established contacts. The questionnaire along with a project background and information sheet were sent via email to the listserv maintained by the Quattrone Center. Initial outreach to these contacts was conducted in November 2023 with follow-up outreach in December 2023 and January 2024. All outreach attempts were done via email. This outreach resulted in 24 direct responses to the questionnaire.

A spreadsheet was developed for data retention, which was updated with the questionnaire responses and information gathered through online research. The data was analyzed using a mixed-method approach. Quantitative measures were used to count the number of known active Units based on available information and identify key facts and figures. A qualitative coding analysis of the scope of work and mission statements was conducted to identify trends in the post-conviction processes across jurisdictions. This qualitative analysis involved open coding of each mission statement, policy, and similar language to measure key constructs based on frequencies, structures, and processes. Patterns and themes emerged to identify key codes, and spreadsheets of codes and code co-occurrence were created for reference.

The mixed-methods approach provides insight into the landscape of Units to help determine targets for the application of the final post-conviction service models and recommendations developed under this project. A detailed analysis of the Scan and findings from the questionnaire responses is provided below.

Results

Through this environmental scan, we identified 115 Units, with 103 currently active, based on information available online and in media articles¹. Twenty-eight states and Washington, D.C. have at least one unit. Ten states have a statewide unit, typically operating through the state Attorney General's office or a similar agency. These states are California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. California has the most county or city-based Units (18); followed by New York (16); Florida (6); and Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Texas (5 each). The first known unit to be established was in 2003, and new units continue to be established at an increasing rate². By 2010, there were three units in the country. By 2015, the first state-level unit was established in New York and 24 units established nationwide. By 2020, the number of units established nationwide grew to 64 units with an additional 39 units established in the last four years (Appendices C and D)

The scope of work of each of these units falls into five primary categories: claims of innocence, potential wrongful convictions, sentence review/excessive sentencing, systematic errors including misconduct, and pardons/clemency. Many of these units work in two or more areas:

- 89% work on claims of innocence;
- 60% work on potential wrongful convictions;
- 21% work on sentence review and/or excessive sentencing;
- 20% work on systematic errors, including 3% that specifically address misconduct; and
- 6% work on pardons and clemency.

¹The additional 12 Units were found on existing lists, but we could not confirm their existence based on current information available through a media search. Some have been disbanded by current government agencies, while others have no information available online.

²Eight Units did not have available information about when they were established.

Of these 103 active Units with an online website, 31% have a clear mission statement specific to the unit; 20% have descriptive language identifying the purpose and scope of work; and an additional 10% use the mission statement of their governing agency. Terms such as “goal,” “purpose,” “duty,” “priority,” and “mandate” were included when identifying mission statements. The remaining 39% do not have a clearly identified mission statement or purpose; the majority of them only provide short information about the process, scope of work, and/or contact information. Among the 63 Units with some level of mission statement or language, the following common themes emerged:

- Pursuit of justice (40%) and truth (19%)
- Integrity (36%)
- Remediating wrongful convictions (29%)
- Increasing community awareness and/or rebuilding trust (25%)
- Improving practices (22%)

In addition, many Units described their approach to the investigative process, using terms like “unbiased,” “objective,” “complete,” “independent,” “fair,” and “collaborative.” Notably, only five units included crime victims and survivors in their mission statements or similar language.

Of the 103 active Units, 34% include information about engaging with a victim advocate. Among those units:

- 5% have a victim advocate assigned to the unit;
- 13% work with a victim advocate in a different part of the governing agency;
- 3% collaborate with advocates from outside agencies; and
- 13% provide general contact information for the agency victim advocate and services.

Additionally, eight Units shared that a non-victim advocate staff person, such as an attorney, paralegal, or unit director, is responsible for engaging victims and survivors and providing them with information and assistance during the post-conviction process.

The findings from this Scan are integral to the broader project, as they help pinpoint common challenges and gaps within the work of Units nationwide. This data enables us to strategically target training and resources developed through this project to specific areas such as improving their overall operations, increasing their use of victim advocates, and developing their holistic support processes. The insights gleaned also highlight opportunities to establish best practices for victim and survivor engagement and strengthen collaboration between these units and other stakeholders. By leveraging this information, we will be able to effectively tailor our national training modules to target key jurisdictions, address specific and expressed needs, promote best practices, and advance broader initiatives aimed at improving post-conviction victim and survivor support.

Conclusion

Despite strides made by criminal legal system professionals in supporting victims and survivors in the post-conviction phase, access to services remains fragmented or nonexistent, particularly in cases being reviewed by Units. The data from the Scan highlights inadequate engagement of victim advocates and, therefore, insufficient support for victims and survivors throughout conviction and sentence review processes. This shortfall in victim and survivor support may be met with confusion by victims and survivors seeking information online about the post-conviction process. Victims and survivors may struggle to find clear answers or understand the next steps in their cases due to lack of clarity in the mission and scope of these Units. The rapid expansion in the number of Units, often without adequate victim advocacy support, has exacerbated the gap, leading to an increased number of underserved victims who do not receive necessary resources and support.

The findings from the Scan enable us to better understand and address the landscape of Units and enhance post-conviction victim services on a broader scale. Additionally, the Scan highlights the emerging need to establish standardized practices for engaging with victims and survivors throughout the post-conviction process for Units nationwide. Some Units have implemented effective missions and well-defined scopes, as well as frameworks for victim support. These successful examples demonstrate how clear practices and structured operations can significantly enhance support for victims and survivors. As we shape our nationwide work through this project, it is crucial to address the gaps identified in this Scan to develop holistic support mechanisms which ensure consistent care and information for victims and survivors. Addressing these gaps will be essential for improving the post-conviction process and ensuring access to holistic resources and support for victims and survivors.

Appendix A: Questionnaire

The below questionnaire was sent out to Unit contacts to gather information related to their unit and processes. Thank you for taking the time to complete this brief questionnaire.

Healing Justice has undertaken a project in collaboration with the National Crime Victim Law Institute, National Organization of Victim Assistance, Urban Institute, and Office for Victims of Crime to develop specialized victim services training and resources for service providers aimed to improve the victim/survivor experience in post-conviction processes. To better inform this project and ensure its success, we are interested in learning more about your specialized conviction or sentence review unit (CRU/SRU). This questionnaire contains specific questions we were unable to find answers to in our independent research, and it should only take approximately 10 minutes. All information you share will be kept strictly confidential and used only for the purposes of informing the project and/or in aggregate form that does not reveal the source.

Thank you again for your time and input. We look forward to learning from you during this project, and we appreciate your dedication to ensuring that crime victims and survivors are supported throughout the criminal justice process. If you have any questions pertaining to this questionnaire or the project, please contact Claire Exley at cexley@healingjusticeproject.org.

Please note that we recognize there are different titles for these types of units. For simplicity, we refer to them as CRUs and SRUs.

What is the name of your CRU/SRU?

Does your CRU/SRU have an identified mission statement?

If yes: Please share your mission statement:

What is the scope of your CRU/SRU? Please select all that apply.

- Claims of Innocence
- Potential wrongful convictions
- Sentencing inequalities
- Excessive sentencing
- Systematic errors
- Pardons/clemency
- Parole or probation
- Other:

Who provides victims with notification of case activity, information about victims' rights and/or other assistance during the post-conviction process?

- Victim advocate assigned to your CRU/SRU
- Victim advocate from another unit within your office
- Other staff (paralegals, investigators, administrative staff, etc.)
- Other:

Please identify if your CRU/SRU works with the following partners? (yes or no)

- System-Based Victim Advocate(s)
- Community-Based Victim Advocate(s)
- System-Based Attorneys
- Community- Based Attorneys

What type of victim assistance does your CRU/SRU offer? (select all that apply)

- Notification about case activity and events
- Information about victims' rights
- Referrals to local services
- None of the above
- Other

Appendix B: List of Units

This full list includes basic information about each unit and was built upon the lists from Quattrone Center and the National Registry of Exonerations. Units marked with an asterisk were not able to be confirmed through our information gathering efforts.

Jurisdiction	State	Name
Jefferson County (Bessemer)	AL	Conviction Integrity Unit
Jefferson County (Birmingham)	AL	Conviction Review Unit
Coconino County*	AZ	
Maricopa County	AZ	Prosecution Integrity Program
Pima County	AZ	Conviction and Sentencing Integrity Unit
Alameda County	CA	Conviction Integrity Unit and Post-Conviction (R
Contra Costa County	CA	Conviction Integrity Unit
Los Angeles County	CA	Conviction Integrity Unit
Merced County	CA	Conviction Review Unit
Monterey County	CA	Conviction Review Unit
Napa County	CA	Conviction Integrity Unit
Nevada County*	CA	
Orange County	CA	Conviction Integrity Unit
Riverside County	CA	Conviction Review Committee
Sacramento County	CA	Justice, Training and Integrity Unit
San Bernardino County	CA	Conviction Review Unit
San Diego County	CA	Conviction Review Unit
San Francisco County	CA	The Innocence Commission
San Joaquin County	CA	Post- Conviction Review Unit
Santa Clara County	CA	Conviction Integrity Unit
Tulare County	CA	Conviction Review Unit
Ventura County	CA	Conviction Integrity Unit
Yolo County	CA	Conviction and Sentence Review Unit
18th Circuit (Arapahoe, Douglas, Elbert and Lincoln Co)*	CO	
Boulder County	CO	Conviction Integrity Unit
Denver County	CO	Conviction Review Unit
1st Circuit (Jefferson and Gilpin Co)	CO	Conviction Integrity Unit
Connecticut (statewide)	CT	Conviction Integrity Unit
Washington DC	DC	Conviction Integrity Unit
Delaware (statewide, run by AG's office)	DE	Actual Innocence Program
13th Circuit (Hillsborough & Tampa Co)	FL	Conviction Review Unit
4th Circuit (Duval, Clay, Nassau Co)	FL	Conviction Integrity Review
9th Circuit (Orange and Osceola Co)	FL	Conviction Integrity Unit

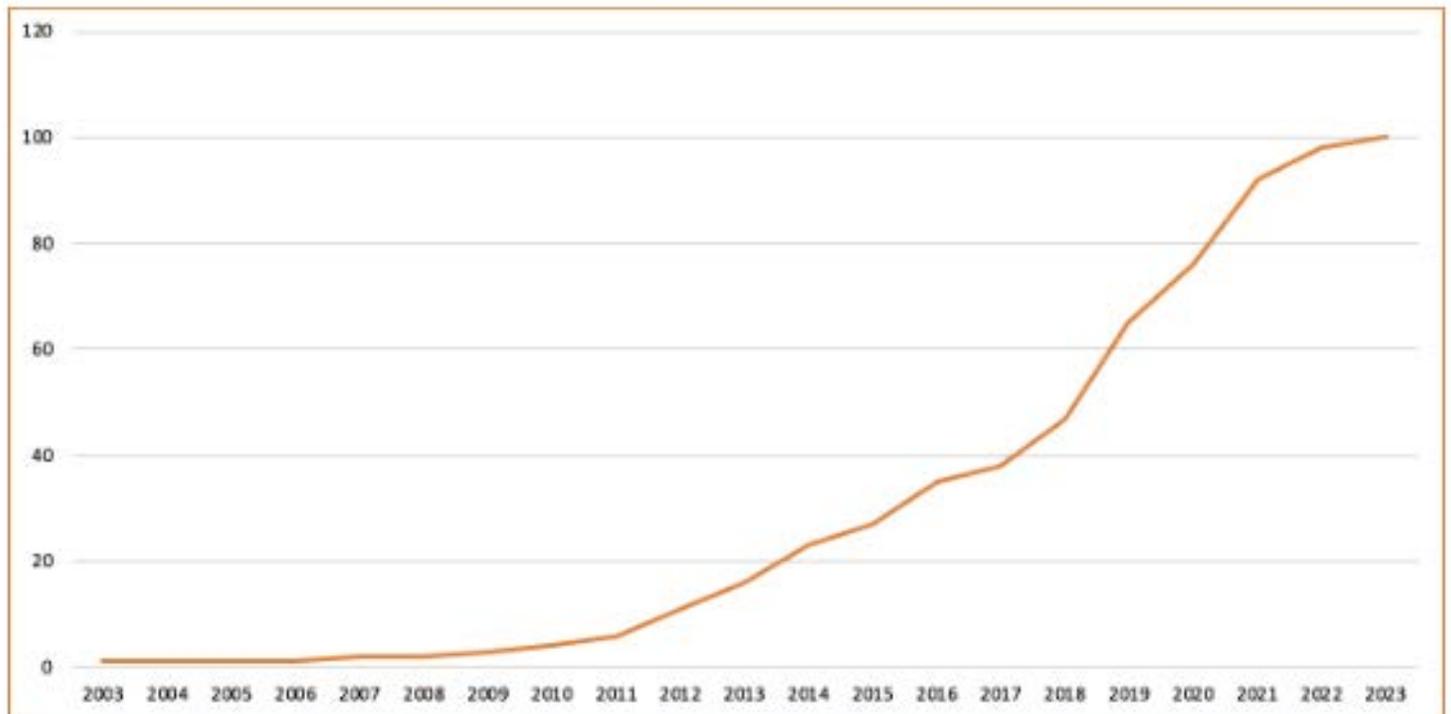
Jurisdiction	State	Name
17th Circuit (Broward Co)	FL	Conviction Review Unit
11th Circuit (Miami-Dade Co)	FL	Justice Project
15th Circuit (Palm Beach Co.)	FL	Conviction Review Unit
18th Circuit (Seminole Co)*	FL	
Chatham County (Eastern Judicial Circuit)*	GA	
Fulton County	GA	Conviction Integrity Unit
Gwinnett County	GA	Conviction Integrity Unit
Cook County	IL	Conviction Integrity Unit
Illinois (statewide, run by AG's office)	IL	Conviction Integrity Unit
Kankakee County	IL	Conviction Integrity Unit
Lake County	IL	Conviction Integrity Unit
Rock Island County	IL	Conviction Integrity/Case Review Unit
Marion County	IN	Conviction Integrity Unit
Wyandotte County	KS	Conviction Integrity Unit
Orleans Parish County	LA	Conviction Accuracy and Integrity Project
Berkshire County*	MA	
Massachusetts (statewide, run by AG's office)	MA	Conviction Integrity Unit
Middlesex County	MA	Conviction Integrity Unit
Northampton County*	MA	
Northwestern District	MA	Conviction Integrity Committee
Plymouth County	MA	Conviction Integrity Unit
Suffolk County	MA	Integrity Review Bureau
Anne Arundel County	MD	Conviction Integrity Unit
Baltimore City County	MD	Conviction Integrity Unit
Montgomery County	MD	Conviction Integrity Division
Prince George's County	MD	Conviction and Sentencing Integrity
Maryland (statewide, run by AG's office)*	MD	
Wicomico County	MD	Prosecution Integrity Unit
Macomb County	MI	Conviction Integrity Unit
Oakland County	MI	Conviction Integrity Unit
Michigan (statewide, run by AG's office)	MI	Conviction Integrity Unit
Washtenaw County	MI	Conviction Integrity and Expungement Unit
Wayne County	MI	Conviction Integrity Unit

Jurisdiction	State	Name
Minnesota (statewide, run by AG's office)	MN	Conviction Review Unit
Ramsey County	MN	Sentence Review Unit
Jackson County	MO	Conviction Integrity Unit
St. Louis City	MO	Conviction Integrity Unit
St. Louis County	MO	Conviction and Incident Review Unit
New Jersey (statewide, run by AG's office)	NJ	Conviction Review Unit
Clark County*	NV	
Bronx County	NY	Conviction Integrity Bureau
Erie County	NY	Conviction Integrity Unit
Kings County	NY	Conviction Review Unit
Monroe County	NY	Conviction Integrity Unit
Nassau County	NY	Conviction Integrity Unit
New York (statewide, run by AG's office)		Conviction Integrity Committee
New York County	NY	Post-Conviction Justice Unit
Oneida County	NY	Conviction Integrity Unit
Orange County	NY	
Putnam County	NY	Conviction Integrity Review
Queens County	NY	Conviction Integrity Unit
Richmond County	NY	Conviction Review Bureau
Suffolk County	NY	Conviction Integrity Bureau
Ulster County	NY	Post- Conviction Justice Unit
Westchester County	NY	Conviction Review Unit
Cuyahoga County	OH	Conviction Integrity Unit
Franklin County	OH	Conviction Integrity Unit
Summit County	OH	Conviction Review Unit
Multnomah County	OR	Justice Integrity Unit
Centre County	PA	Conviction Integrity Unit
Chester County	PA	Conviction Integrity Review
Dauphin County	PA	Conviction Integrity Unit
Philadelphia County	PA	Conviction Integrity Unit
Pennsylvania (Statewide, run by AG's office)	PA	Conviction Integrity Section
Davidson County	TN	Conviction Review Unit
Shelby County	TN	Justice Review Unit
Bexar County	TX	Conviction Integrity Unit
Collin County*	TX	

Jurisdiction	State	Name
Dallas County	TX	Conviction Integrity Division
Harris County	TX	Conviction Integrity Unit
Tarrant County	TX	Conviction Integrity Unit
Travis County	TX	Conviction Integrity Unit
Davis County	UT	Conviction Integrity Unit
Salt Lake County	UT	Conviction Review Unit
Summit County	UT	Conviction Integrity Unit
Utah County	UT	Conviction Integrity Unit
Arlington County	VA	Conviction Review Unit
Portsmouth County*	VA	
Virginia (statewide, run by AG's office)*	VA	
King County	WA	Sentence Review Unit

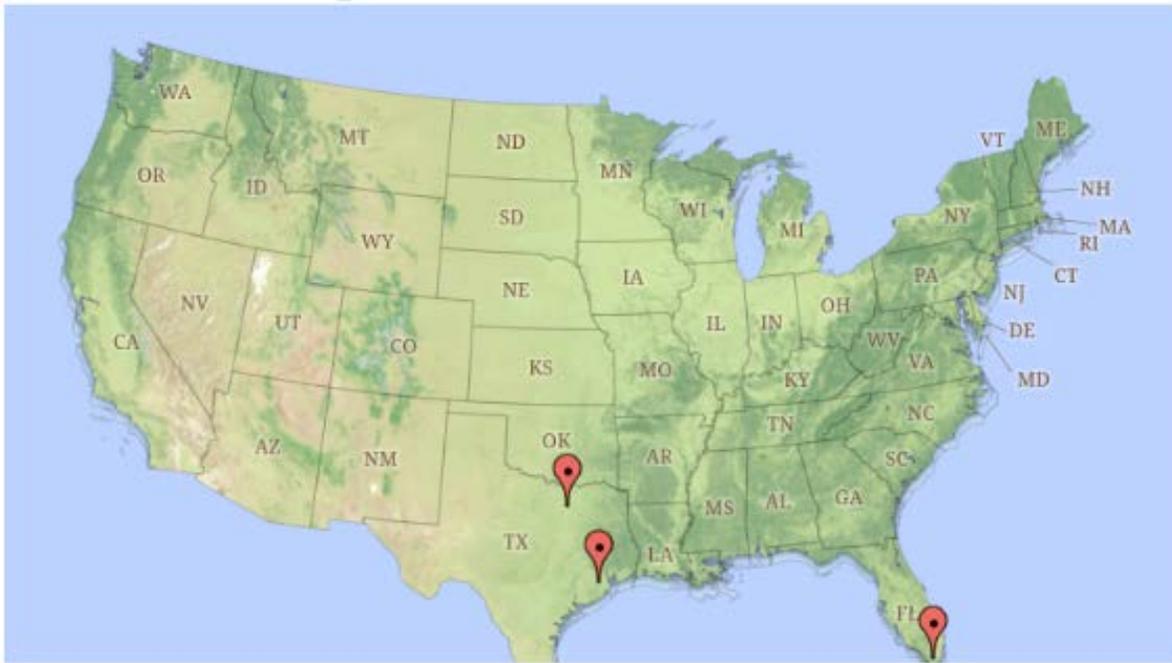
Appendix C: Graph of Units Created Over Time

Line graph representing the influx of CRUs/SRUs units established between 2003 and 2023.

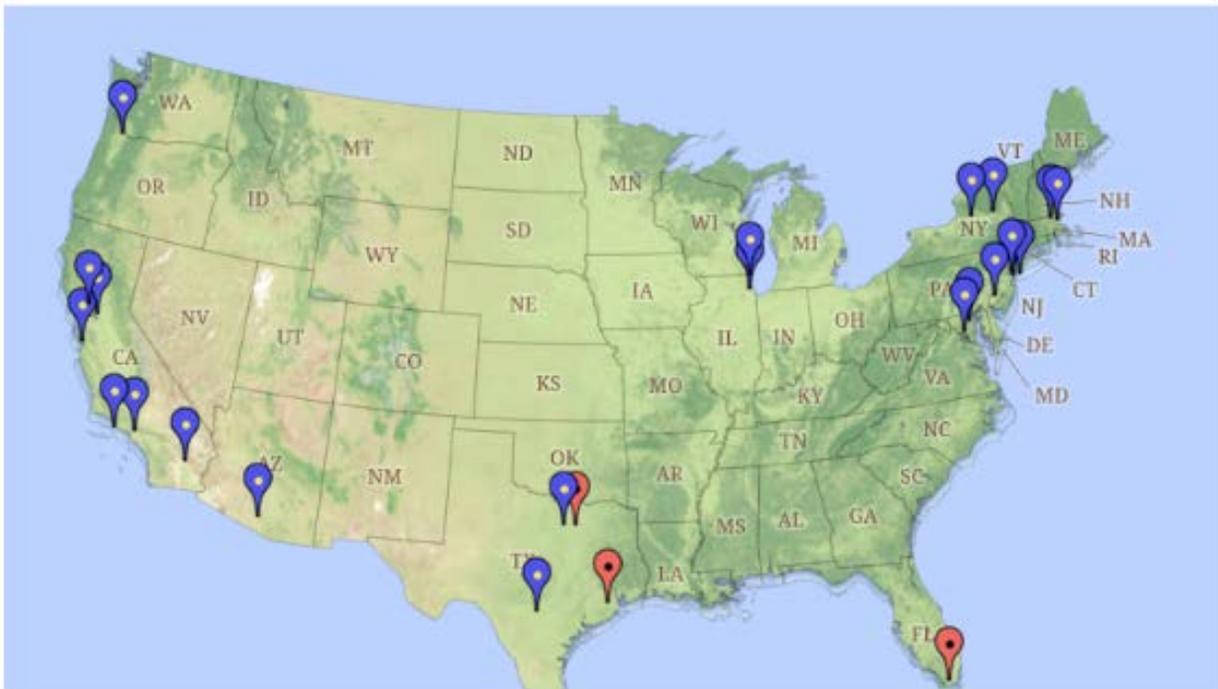


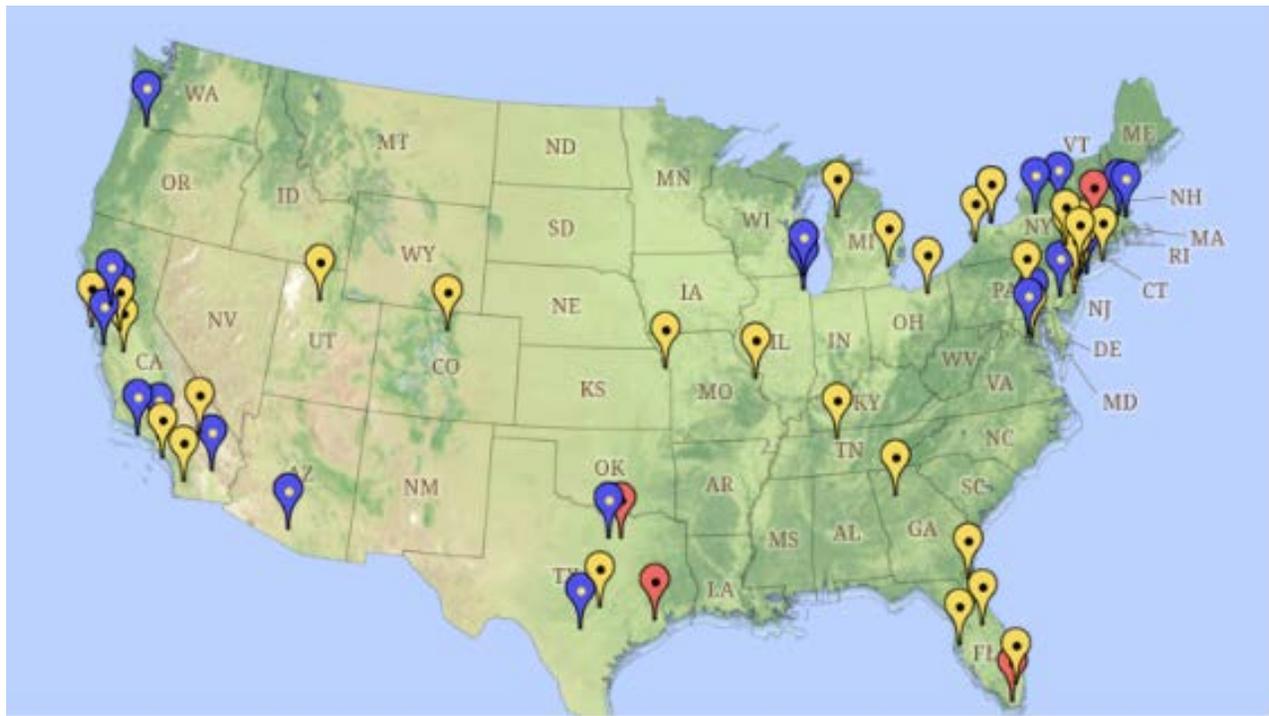
Appendix D: Maps of Units Created Over Time

These maps represent the locations of Units established by 2010 (Map 1), 2015 (Map 2), 2019 (Map 3) and 2023 (Map 4).

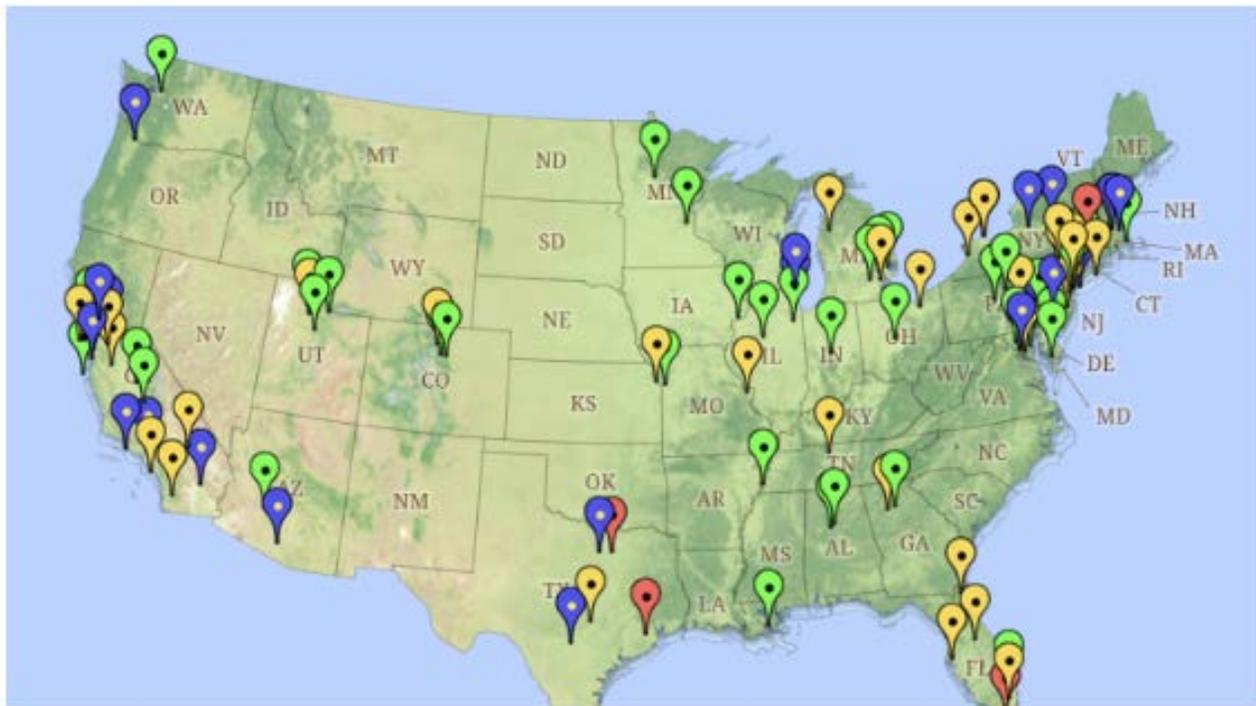


Map 1 - 2010





Map 3 - 2019



Map 4 - 2023