OVERVIEW
The National Association of Counties’ (NACo) Smart Justice efforts aim to build knowledge and capacity for successful justice policies and practices among the nation’s counties. Smart Justice projects enhance partnerships among public, private and philanthropic leaders along with national experts to promote safer communities and utilize taxpayer money more effectively and efficiently.

County governments are often the entities directly and indirectly providing services to enhance individuals’ lives and are responsible for maintaining public safety and the efficient use of local dollars, all while dealing with shrinking budgets, structural inefficiencies and rising pretrial jail populations. In 2012, county and other local jails admitted 11.6 million people, costing more than $70.2 billion in county justice and public safety services. Justice programs are among the largest cost centers for county governments as they operate 3,105 county police and sheriff departments at $30.2 billion each year, spend more than $23.3 billion on correctional facilities and allocate another $16.7 billion to county courts and legal services annually. Smart Justice programming provides a catalyst to expand knowledge and resources for counties on a wide array of local justice issues.

PRINCIPLES
NACo’s Smart Justice projects address local justice issues including informed pretrial decision-making, juvenile justice innovation, the Affordable Care Act and jails, connections among behavioral health and justice systems at the local level, indigent defense and local and state collaboration. Projects engage county officials, national thought leaders and partners across the country by:

- Promoting evidence-based, data-driven local justice policies and practices throughout the nation’s counties;
- Taking a leadership role in exploring and implementing local justice reforms;
- Developing strategies to save counties money while creating safer communities; and
- Providing education and assistance to counties to assess their adult and juvenile systems to explore opportunities for efficient and effective use of public dollars.

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SMART JUSTICE IN ACTION

NACo Past President Chris Rodgers welcomes participants to the 2013 Smart Justice Symposium. Smart Justice projects build off Rodgers’ commitment to promote safer communities while effectively and efficiently using public resources.

Photo by Henry Salazar, L.A. County