

Lessons In Reentry From Successful Programs And Participants:

The Final Report of the Reentry Employment Opportunities Benchmarking Study



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Executive Summary

The policy landscape around criminal justice, mass incarceration, and sentencing laws has begun to shift as research across disciplines has shown the significant damage caused to individuals, families, and society by locking up large numbers of American citizens.^{1,2} While incarceration rates remain high, these policy shifts, combined with slight decreases in crime, have led to recent drops in state and federal prison populations.³ The number of citizens leaving prison, however, continues to be substantial—with hundreds of thousands returning home annually.⁴

With a majority of returning citizens coming from high poverty communities and with limited work or educational experiences, the pressures of reentry can be daunting. Many can't get a job, public benefits, housing, or even an identification card, each of which decreases the odds of recidivism.⁵

For the last decade, faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs), funded through the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) program, have been working with returning citizens to obtain livable wage jobs that increase those odds of a successful return home. This report summarizes observations and findings from a year-long benchmarking study of the REO grant program and highlights successful REO grantees and their promising practices in connecting justice-involved youth and adult returning citizens to work, education, and training programs. Using a phased approach, this study included an extant data analysis of 121 organizations receiving 192 grants across eight years of REO funding. High-performing REO grantees were identified based on a review of DOL employment and recidivism performance data, document reviews of individual program progress reports, and grey literature. Five programs participated in a series of semi-structured interviews, two of which also hosted site visits and focus groups among youth and adult participants.

Key FBCO Practices

From this data and document review, as well as the reflections and recommendations from REO grantee staff and participants, we identified four key practice and policy areas that offer opportunities for advancing the field of employment-based reentry. Each of these areas is briefly summarized below and discussed in greater depth in the body of this report.

Assessment and Service Individualization

High-performing REO programs individualize services based on participant needs, interests, and assets, using a range of instruments, with some taking a systematic approach to assessment differentiation that analyzes criminogenic risk and employment readiness to determine whether participants are low or high risk and more or less employment ready. But many programs also 'naturally' expend fewer resources on lower risk/more ready participants, where the more ready participants may start with a higher-tier credential program and/or spend less time in the program than higher risk/less ready participants. High performers work to address basic needs in tandem

¹ Travis, J., Western, B., & Redburn, F. S. (2014). *The growth of incarceration in the United States: Exploring causes and consequences*. Washington, DC: the National Academies Press. Retrieved from <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/18613/the-growth-of-incarceration-in-the-united-states-exploring-causes>

² The Mellman Group & Public Opinion Strategies. (2016). *Voters want big changes in federal sentencing, prison system: Majority supports broad reforms for drug offenses, national poll finds*. Philadelphia, PA: The Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved from <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/analysis/2016/02/12/voters-want-changes-in-federal-sentencing-prison-system>

³ Carson, E. A. (2014). *Prisoners in 2014*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=5387>

⁴ Carson, 2014.

⁵ See Comfort, M. (2012). "It was basically college to us": Poverty, prison, and emerging adulthood. *Journal of Poverty*, 16(3), 308–322; Retrieved from http://nationinside.org/images/pdf/The_Relationship_between_Poverty_and_Mass_Incarceration.pdf

with employment support, both internally or through community-based partnerships, which include transportation, food, clothing, housing, and medical challenges. Many are also interested in learning more about how best to address and understand the effects participants' past experiences, family history, exposure to violence, and trauma have on their success in the REO program, but few have the tools to do so. Policymakers and DOL should:

- Increase support for FBCOs that have strong systems and practices in place to assess and individualize services.
- Help FBCOs build capacity to access and use research-validated assessment instruments.
- Help FBCOs build capacity to understand and appropriately address participants' past experiences and trauma.

Pre-Release and Collaboration with Justice

FBCOs have varied and nuanced relationships with their local Departments of Corrections (DOC), probation officers, and courts. These relationships may begin pre-release, into work release, and continue when participants return to their communities. Several high-performers receive referrals for program participants directly from DOCs and juvenile courts, in some instances using court advocates to attend court proceedings with youth and/or solicit referrals. Some programs also enter adult prison facilities to offer work readiness training pre-release, seeing this time as critical to preparing individuals for work release, the employment program, and success in the community. This pre-release identification and training, however, requires strong partnerships and resources brought into prison facilities. Collaboration with work release programs was also key, but most FBCOs struggled to offer multiple training opportunities in light of requirements by work release programs for immediate employment and restitution payment. Greater emphasis on supporting REO grantee pre-release services would allow more programs to access inmates early and begin training and case management services that complement existing correctional training supports. Further, the relationships established pre-release should be extended into work release. To improve access as well as collaboration between FBCOs and justice programs, the Departments of Labor and Justice should:

- Increase FBCO access to prison facilities to provide employment readiness training and assessments that complement existing facility trainings and ease the transition to work release and ultimately the community.
- Support leniency or relief from work and restitution payment requirements in work release that would allow more FBCOs to offer multiple credentialing opportunities that improve participants' career trajectories.

Career Pathways

Many high performers rely on labor market information and employer relationships to identify high-growth job sectors in their communities that are available to returning citizens. Many focused on customer services, construction, and skilled trades and all used career assessments and inventories to help participants identify their occupational strengths and interest areas. Most, however, had neither the time in the grant period nor the resources to offer stacked credentialing opportunities that would help participants develop career pathways toward higher-earning jobs. To improve career pathway opportunities for returning citizens, policymakers and the Departments of Labor and Justice should:



- Invest in additional implementation and impact research focused on the use of career pathways approaches to employment-based reentry services.
- Extend the REO period of performance to provide programs ample time and resources to support higher-tier credential attainment and advancement along a career pathway for returning citizens.

Mentoring

Most high-performing programs offer a combination of group and one-to-one mentoring, and several employ cognitive behavioral therapy-based curricula to guide group mentoring sessions and inform mentor training. Participation in group mentoring was common among most FBCOs, but there was less participation in one-to-one mentoring. Focus group participants shared insights relating to the limited use of individual mentoring, emphasizing the strong mentoring relationships many had with their case managers and staff instead. Programs did not consistently track dosage or match retention rates for either group or one-on-one mentoring, but most felt strongly that their mentoring programs helped young adults and returning citizens turn their lives in a positive direction. Based on these observations, policymakers and DOL should:

- Support FBCO efforts to learn more about and infuse cognitive behavioral therapy into their mentoring approaches.
- Study whether a re-conceptualized case management approach that formally incorporates mentoring principles and practices and adjusts caseload sizes to permit more personalized attention can lead to better program outcomes.

Successful reentry from prison, whether for a young person or adult, requires a mix of internal motivators and external supports, the latter of which draw not only from one's family, but from a network of social service, health, employment, justice, and education programs. Faith-based and community programs located in the communities to which citizens return have become critical hubs for the alignment and coordination of these diverse and complex systems of care. Not only wrapping participants in needed and varied support services, they focus their most intensive efforts on one of the greatest hurdles returning citizens face—finding and retaining jobs that lead to real and lasting economic self-sufficiency. Additional research and adoption of enhanced practices in these four areas by the broader field of FBCO practitioners would help move the needle for justice-involved youth and returning citizens, creating safer and healthier communities and families across the United States.

Introduction

ICF International (ICF), with support from the Ford Foundation, partnered with the Union Theological Seminary, Exodus Transitional Community, and Operation New Hope to conduct this year-long benchmarking study of the Department of Labor's (DOL) employment-focused reentry programs. The Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) grant programs help justice-involved youth and formerly incarcerated adults reengage society and the workforce, ultimately striving to minimize the economic and social costs to individuals, families, and communities associated with incarceration and recidivism. This study sought to answer several key questions, including:



1. Which are the highest performing faith-based and community (FBCO) REO grantees?
2. What research-informed or promising practices are they using?
3. What recommendations do FBCOs (and their youth and adult participants) have to improve services as new REO grant funding is considered?

To answer these questions, ICF analyzed DOL performance metrics from 19 REO grant programs to identify a subset of FBCOs that had demonstrated consistently high performance, and then conducted a series of interviews, focus groups, and on-site visits to glean common promising approaches and program and policy recommendations.

This final report encapsulates the key observations and takeaways from this benchmarking process and provides an overview of existing research on reentry best practices in four common REO practice and policy areas. It also describes specific FBCO program examples of how select high-performing organizations are implementing these practices in the field.

Additionally, this report is a part of a larger effort that includes a public educational campaign on the roles that FBCOs can play in reducing recidivism rates and helping individuals impacted by incarceration achieve sustained employment. Complementary products and aspects of this study include:

- ***Two policy extracts*** that highlight promising practices and recommendations relating to assessment and individualization of services and pre-release supports that include enhanced justice collaborations.
- ***An education campaign*** that increases awareness among federal policymakers, think-tanks, philanthropic foundations, and the public about the contributions of employment-focused reentry FBCOs in improving outcomes for returning citizens.
- A Washington, D.C.-based ***Congressional briefing*** that explores innovative and research-based employment solutions for returning citizens.
- ***A concept paper and recommendations for future research*** that will help determine the effectiveness of particular FBCO reentry strategies and their application in public policy.

The remainder of this report includes: (1) background information on reentry and employment research and data, (2) an overview of the DOL REO grant program, (3) a discussion of this study's methods and limitations, (4) an overview of the phases of this study and key takeaways at each stage, and (5) a detailed discussion of observations, recommendations, and promising approaches from interviewed FBCO program staff, adult, and youth participants.⁶

⁶ Some recommendations are targeted to the REO program in particular; others are more general for the field of FBCOs offering employment-based reentry services.

Background on Reentry and Employment

At the end of 2014, prisons, jails, and juvenile detention systems in the U.S. held 1,561,500 adult and juvenile inmates, a number almost four times greater than four decades before.⁷ Criminal recidivism rates (re-arrest for a new crime) are also high, accounting for approximately 45 percent of adult offenders in 2011.⁸ The cycling of citizens in and out of prisons and jails results in immense costs to corrections systems. But, these financial costs are only a small fraction of the social and economic costs of incarceration for individuals, families, and communities.

A 2010 report from the Center for Economic and Policy Research estimated there are between 12 and 14 million ex-offenders of working age.⁹ The authors suggested that this large pool of returned citizens lowered the total national male employment rate by 1.5 to 1.7 percentage points and the overall U.S. employment rate by .9 percentage points. “Even at the relatively low productivity rates of ex-offenders,” they stated, “the resulting loss of output is somewhere between \$57 and \$65 billion.”¹⁰

Likewise, although the link between incarceration and decreased employability is established,¹¹ there are no national estimates on employment placement or earnings rates for returned citizens. Some research suggests lifetime earnings for the formerly incarcerated can be almost 30 percent lower than they are for the rest of the working population.¹²

Despite these high costs, a 2015 report from the Congressional Research Service noted a significant dearth of rigorous research on reentry programs.¹³ Of those studies that exist, most present a complex picture related to employment and recidivism, with few demonstrating that employment placement necessarily leads to lower recidivism rates. Recently released findings from an evaluation of the first generation of REO funding presents similar results and suggests that returning citizens need more wrap-around services and vocational training than the early REO grant programs required.

In June 2009, DOL’s Employment and Training Administration (ETA) contracted with Social Policy Research Associates (SPR Associates) and subcontractors MDRC and NORC to conduct an impact evaluation of 24 REO grantees, then called the Reintegration of Ex-Offenders (RExO) grants. These 24 grantees, selected from the group of 30 Generation I awardees, were provided additional funding to continue RExO programming through March 2011 and to participate in a randomized control trial. SPR Associates released a two-year impact study report in May 2015 with mixed findings. Although program participants were slightly more likely to obtain employment (and to obtain it more quickly) than the control group, they did not report more days employed in the two-year follow-up than the control group. Further, the study found no impact on hourly wages or on recidivism. SPR Associates suggests that one reason for the modest results was that programs may not have had sufficient resources to address the many employment barriers formerly incarcerated participants

⁷ Carson, 2014.

⁸ Pew Center on the States. (2011). *State of recidivism: The revolving door of America’s prisons*. Philadelphia, PA: The Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved from http://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/reports/sentencing_and_corrections/staterecidivismrevolvingdooramericaprison20pdf.pdf. Note: National youth recidivism rates are not available, due to variant calculation levels by state.

⁹ Schmitt, J., & Warner, K. (2010). *Ex-offenders and the labor market*. Washington, DC: Center for Economic and Policy Research. Retrieved from <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/ex-offenders-2010-11.pdf>

¹⁰ Schmitt & Warner, 2010.

¹¹ See, e.g., Holzer, H., Raphael, S., & Stoll, M. (2003). *Employment barriers facing ex-offenders*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.urban.org/research/publication/employment-barriers-facing-ex-offenders>

¹² Holwell, P., & Gardner, D. (2014). *Workforce centers: Successful labor market reentry for justice involved ex-offenders*. Centennial, CO: Arapahoe/Douglas Works. Retrieved from http://www.adworks.org/pdf/Supporting_Successful_LM_Reentry_for_Justice_Involved.pdf

¹³ James, N. (2015). *Offender reentry: Correctional statistics, reintegration into the community, and recidivism*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service. Retrieved from <https://fas.org/sfp/crs/misc/RL34287.pdf>

often have, including mental and physical health problems, housing, and substance use problems. The intensity of services also varied greatly among those served. For instance, fewer than one in five program participants received any form of vocational or other forms of training designed to enhance their skills in in-demand industries.¹⁴ Further, work readiness training ranged from only a few hours to more than 24 hours in total duration.

The literature on employment-based reentry services, although scant, does suggest, however, that reentry initiatives that combine work training and placement with counseling and housing assistance are most likely to reduce recidivism rates. The 2015 Congressional Research Service's report suggested that the best designed programs are those that prepare offenders to reenter society, connect them with services immediately after release, and provide long-term supports and supervision to settle permanently back into the community. Further, several studies on subsidized employment and supportive service models for returning citizens suggest that providing transitional supports as participants attempt to move from subsidized employment to unsubsidized employment is critical for long-term success.¹⁵

The current DOL REO grant cohorts have been designed and revised to leverage this growing body of research. This most recent slate of REO grant programs, such as Training to Work, strongly emphasizes the implementation of career pathways programs that look beyond basic job placement to providing returning citizens the credentials and training they need to succeed in higher paying careers in in-demand sectors. The following section provides an overview of the REO grant programs, including a brief history of their inception and a description of the various grant programs and cohorts within REO.

Overview of the Department of Labor's REO Grant Program

Early in the George W. Bush Administration, DOL began to design and implement employment-focused reentry programs. The first of these initiatives, Ready4Work, was a public/private collaboration, funded by DOL and private foundations, including the Ford Foundation. Launched in 2003, Ready4Work supported an 18-site pilot program to strengthen grassroots FBCO groups that work with formerly incarcerated persons to promote social attachment and employment. The program combined intensive case management with mentoring and human services referrals to help deal with the complex challenges faced by returnees. An implementation study of Ready4Work found that program participants had substantially lower rates of recidivism compared to the national reentry population.¹⁶ In 2005, DOL's ETA launched the first competitive Reentry Employment Opportunities (formerly known as Reintegration of Ex-Offenders or RExO) grants, funding 30 organizations and serving more than 24,000 formerly incarcerated adults.

The REO grant programs were originally authorized as pilot and demonstration projects under Section 171 of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. They were tasked with serving urban centers and areas of greatest need and to test community and faith-based reentry models. Today, they continue to aim to strengthen communities through projects that incorporate mentoring, job training, education, legal aid services, and other comprehensive transitional services for returning

¹⁴ Wiegand, A., Sussell, J., Valentine, E., & Henderson, B. (2015). *Evaluation of the Re-Integration of Ex-Offenders (RExO) Program: Two-year impact report*. Oakland, CA: Social Policy Research Associates.

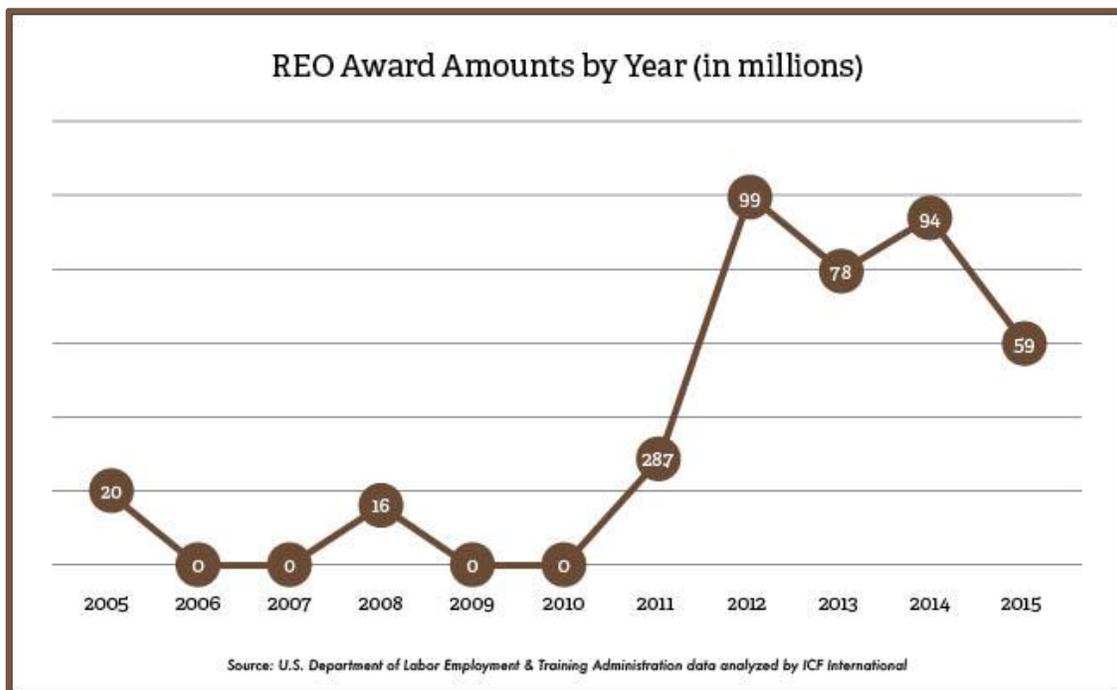
¹⁵ See Redcross, C., Bloom, D., Valentine, E. J., Manno, S., Muller-Ravett, S., Seefeldt, K., et al. (2010). *Work after prison: One-year findings from the Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration*. New York: MDRC. Retrieved from <http://www.mdrc.org/publication/work-after-prison>; Redcross, C., Bloom, D., Azurdia, G., Zweig, J., & Pindus, N. (2009). *Transitional jobs for ex-prisoners: Implementation, two-year impacts, and costs of the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) Prisoner Reentry Program*. New York: MDRC. Retrieved from <http://www.mdrc.org/publication/transitional-jobs-ex-prisoners>

¹⁶ Baldry, S., Korom-Djakovic, D., McClanahan, W., McMaken, J., & Kotloff, L. (2009). *Mentoring formerly incarcerated adults: Insights from the Ready4Work Initiative*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.

citizens. Grants are awarded through a competitive process open to any nonprofit organization with 501(c)(3) status, unit of state or local government, or any Indian and Native American entity eligible for grants under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.¹⁷ From 2005-2015, DOL launched 19 grant program cohorts providing approximately \$394.7 million to 183 organizations through 266 grants (some organizations received multiple grants).¹⁸ See Appendix A for a description of each grant cohort, including the number and total amount of awards.

Annual funding awards for REO programs has fluctuated over the years, peaking at \$99 million in 2012. The following chart (Figure 1) shows the total amount of REO awards per year since 2005.¹⁹ Since 2011, DOL has released a number of new grant programs, testing new approaches or focusing on specific populations. Training to Work and Face Forward were the only two grant programs with awards in 2015.

Figure 1: Annual REO Grant Award Amounts



REO Benchmarking Study Methods

The purpose of this benchmarking study was to identify successful REO programs and to highlight promising practices in connecting justice-involved youth and adult returning citizens to work, education, and/or training programs. The study took a phased approach to analyze performance data and program services to gradually narrow to a pool of high-performing programs. The three

¹⁷ U.S. Department Labor Employment and Training Administration. (2015). *REO: Reentry employment opportunities*. Retrieved from http://www.doleta.gov/REO/eta_default.cfm

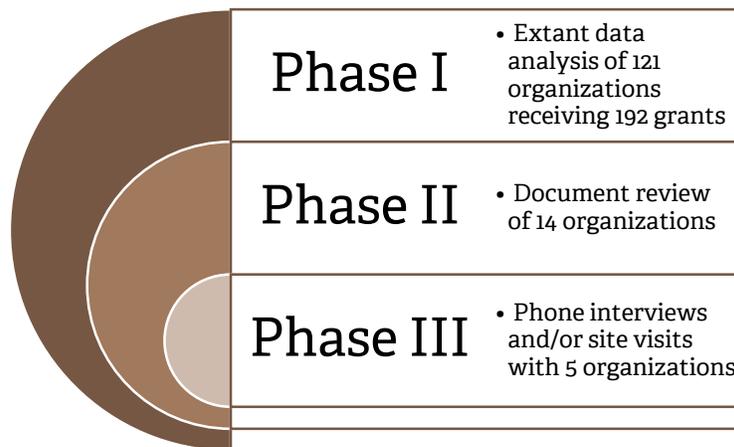
¹⁸ As noted above, the extant data analysis only included those grants issued prior to 2014, since the newer grants did not yet have outcome data for a sufficient number of participants. The analysis included 121 organizations receiving 192 grants from 2005–2013.

¹⁹ This analysis does not include Linking Employment Activities Pre-release Specialized American Job Centers grants nor the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe grants in this analysis since they had different eligibility requirements for application or service, respectively, than the other REO grants.

phases of this study are highlighted in Figure 2 and as follows:

1. **Phase I: Extant Data Analysis.** During this phase, ICF analyzed performance data from 121 unique organizations that had received funding through one or more REO grant programs issued from 2005-2013.²⁰
2. **Phase II: Document Review.** ICF conducted a document review of the high-performing organizations identified through Phase I. Based on the document review, we selected five organizations to participate in the third phase of the study.
3. **Phase III: Phone Interviews and Site Visits.** ICF conducted phone interviews with five organizations, then selected two of those organizations for site visits, which included multiple staff interviews and participant focus groups.

Figure 2: REO Study Phased Approach



Limitations of this study include:

- **Reliance on self-reported data.** The performance data used to select high-performing REO organizations was self-reported to DOL ETA and was not verified by administrative data. In their longitudinal study, Social Policy Research Associates found that the self-reported data obtained by the participating Generation I RExO grantees were more positive than the outcomes the administrative data confirmed. In general, self-reported recidivism rates were lower and employment and wage reports were higher than those obtained through administrative sources.²¹ The challenges of obtaining accurate self-report data, however, were consistent across REO cohorts.
- **Focus on current practices.** Phone interviews and site visits focused on current practices and lessons learned over time, rather than the specific practices that occurred during a period of high performance. ICF chose not to limit the interviews to historic practices due to staff turnover and the difficulties inherent in recalling the organizational practices that occurred during a specific time period in the past.
- **Limited attribution.** Because this study did not include a random assignment or quasi-experimental component, ICF is unable to conclude whether the practices discussed in the phone interviews and site visits led directly to the higher performance observed from self-reported data.

²⁰ An additional 62 organizations received REO funding from 2014–2015, but those programs were too new to produce outcome data for our analysis.

²¹ Wiegand et al., 2015.

The limitations of this study highlight the need for further implementation research combined with an impact analysis to conclusively identify direct service practices that lead to stronger employment gains and reduced recidivism. Although narrow in scope, this study contributes to the field and future research by detailing the promising practices of organizations that may have contributed to strong outcomes relative to one another through their REO funding. The remaining content in this section provides greater detail on the three-phase analysis approach used to identify high-performing REO grantees and their program practices.

Phase I: Identify High-Performing REO Programs

ICF took a multi-step approach to this first phase of analysis, gradually narrowing the pool of grantees from 121 organizations to the 14 recommended for Phase II analysis. We first developed a theory of change and logic model (see Appendix B) that were used to determine which DOL performance metrics would be further analyzed (see Figure 3 and Appendix C for a detailed explanation of each metric and the grant cohorts to which each applied). ICF compared organizational performance in these key measures within grant cohorts, identifying organizations that performed in the top 30 percent across two or more metrics within their grant cohort. This enabled us to identify 42 organizations that out-performed their peers within the same cohort. We then compared the 42 high-performing organizations with one another across grant programs and cohorts. As youth-serving programs tended to have different and additional performance metrics than adult programs, we analyzed the youth and adult programs separately. Within the youth and adult groups, we identified those organizations that performed in the top 30 percent across two or more metrics. Seeking well-rounded high performers, we then calculated average performance rates across each of the key metrics, and cut any high performers who had below-average performance in two or more key metrics. This left 14 organizations we classified as ‘high-performing’ across grant cohorts. Appendix D includes details on the outcomes achieved by these organizations.

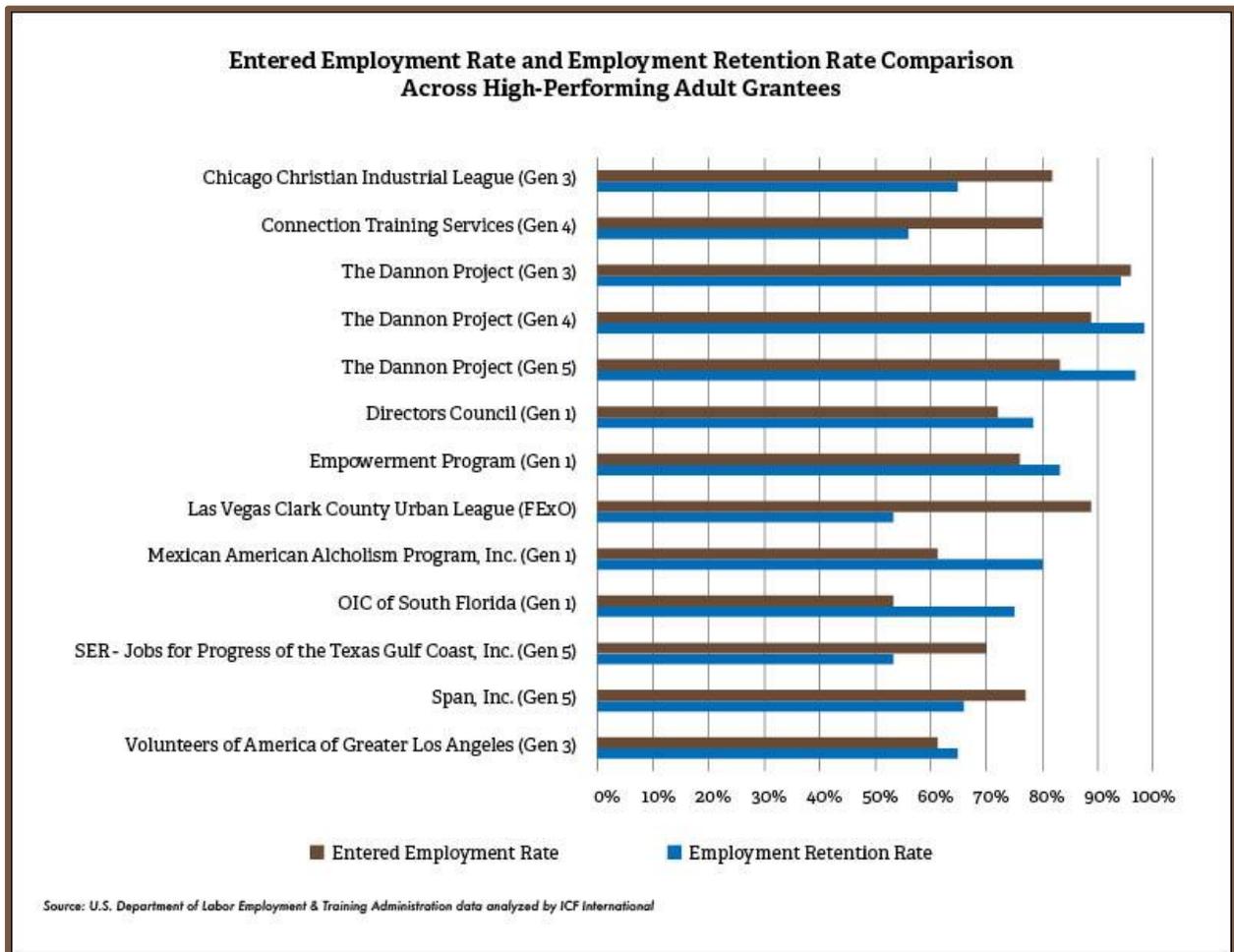
Entering and retaining employment are two key metrics hypothesized to lead to reduced recidivism and increased long-term self-sufficiency. The following table (Figure 4) shows grantee performance on these two metrics side-by-side, highlighting that retention rates showed slightly greater variance for this group of top performers than the rate of entering employment. Definitions for the grant cohort abbreviations and descriptions of each program can be found in Appendix A.

Figure 3: Key REO Performance Metrics

ICF compared the following key performance metrics within and then across REO grant cohorts:

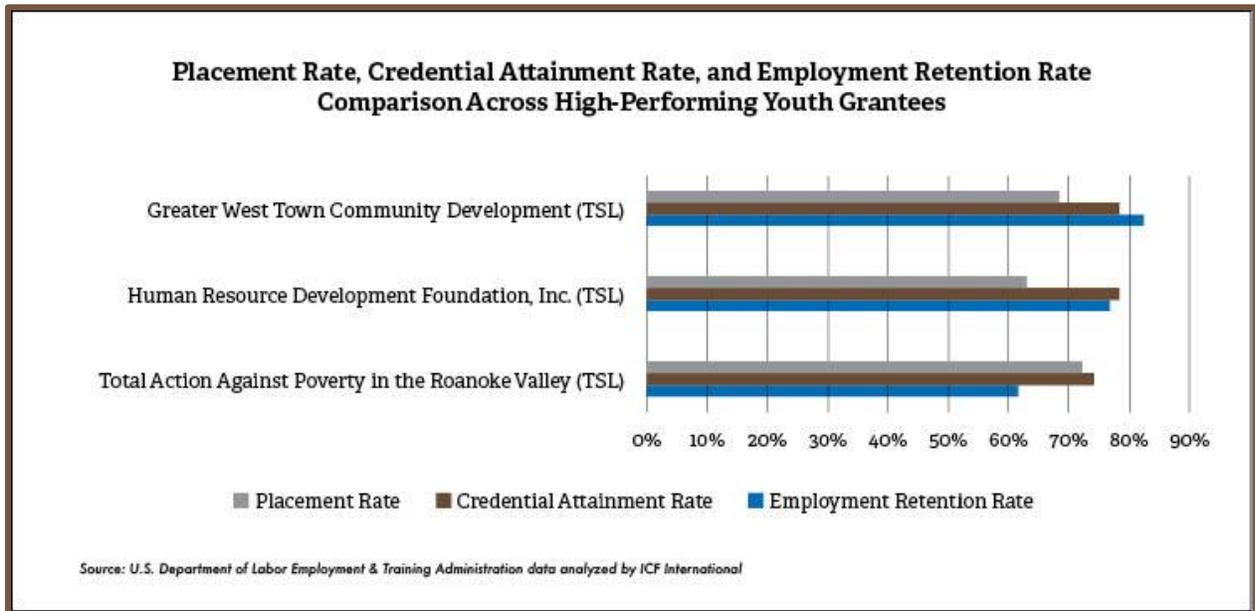
- Credential attainment rate
- Entered employment or placement rate
- Employment retention rate
- Earnings
- Recidivism rate

Figure 4: Entering and Retaining Employment Rates across Adult-Serving Top Performers



Several youth-focused grants required organizations to track placement rates inclusive of educational and employment placement rather than entered employment rates. The following chart (Figure 5) captures three key metrics for youth-focused grants: placement in education or employment, credential attainment, and employment retention. Although credential attainment rates and, to a lesser degree, placement rates are comparable across organizations, employment retention rates showed greater variance (a 22 point difference). The highest youth performers were all recipients of the Training and Service Learning (TSL) grants (see Appendix A for a description of this program).

Figure 5: Placement, Credential Attainment, and Employment Retention Rates across Youth-Serving Top Performers



Phase II: Document Review of High-Performing Programs

ICF conducted a thorough document review of the high-performing organizations identified through Phase I. This review included an analysis of applications for funding, semi-annual and final reports, any evaluations that had been completed on the program, and other publically available information on the program or organization. We documented potential best practices, challenges, lessons learned, and questions for further exploration. Based on the document review, we then selected five organizations to participate in the third phase of the study (Figure 6). ICF prioritized selecting organizations that had performed well on more than one REO grant, and who appeared to be using research-informed practices in the implementation of their grants, such as the use of assessment data to develop individualized case plans,²² the use of job developers to actively cultivate and incentivize job placement (such as the use of on-the-job training),²³ and the provision of industry-recognized credentials in in-demand sectors.²⁴ ICF also sought programmatic diversity in terms of location and target population.

²² Duran, L., Plotkin, M., Potter, P., & Rosen, H. (2013). *Integrated reentry and employment strategies: Reducing recidivism and promoting job readiness*. New York: Council of State Governments Justice Center. Retrieved from https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Final.Reentry-and-Employment.pp_.pdf

²³ Werner, A., Rappaport, C. D., Stuart, J. B., & Lewis, J. (2013). *Literature review: Career pathways programs*, OPRE Report #2013-24, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/cp_lit_review_final_62613_edits.pdf

²⁴ Maguire, S., Freely, J., Clymer, C., Conway, M., & Schwartz, D. (2010). *Tuning into local labor markets: Findings from the sectoral employment impact study*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures. Retrieved from <http://www.aspenwsi.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/TuningIntoLocalLaborMarkets.pdf>

Figure 6: List of Phase III Organizations

Organization	Number of REO Grants	Youth or Adult	Location
The Dannon Project	8	Both	Birmingham, AL
Human Resource Development Foundation	2	Youth	Morgantown, WV
Connection Training Services	7	Both	Philadelphia, PA
OIC of South Florida	5	Adult	Miami/Ft. Lauderdale, FL
Volunteers of America Greater Los Angeles	2	Adult	Los Angeles, CA

Phase III: Interviews and Site Visits

In December 2015, ICF completed semi-structured staff phone interviews with the five REO organizations listed in Figure 6. ICF started with a comprehensive list of topics encompassing intake and assessment, case management and supportive services, education and training, job development, and data management. ICF chose to focus on these topics because they reflect core requirements from the DOL's REO grant funding opportunity announcements. After analyzing the interview responses, ICF decided to conduct site visits at The Dannon Project and OIC of South Florida (OIC-SFL) based on a mix of their performance data, DOL documentation, and articulation of systematic approaches and strong community collaborations. These visits included in-depth interviews with key staff on the following topics: 1) assessment and service differentiation, 2) career pathways, 3) family engagement, 4) justice collaborations, and 5) mentoring. These topics were selected because they represented areas of either strong organizational practice or learning. ICF also obtained input on them from DOL ETA and this project's Technical Working Group (see Acknowledgements). During the site visits, ICF conducted focus groups with former youth and adult program participants who answered questions about career pathways, family engagement, and mentoring. ICF also conducted follow-up phone interviews on the same topics with the three organizations that were not selected for site visits.

Reflections, Observations, and Recommendations

Below are reflections and observations from program staff interviews and focus groups conducted across the five high-performing REO grantees identified in Phases II and III of this study. We also make recommendations to policymakers, practitioners, and evaluators to help enhance employment reentry practice and research. These considerations carry across the primary areas of service delivery for REO programs (such as assessment, progression along career pathways, and mentoring) to community collaborations essential in supporting returning citizens (such as pre-release and justice coordination).

While some grantee experiences were unique to the political, economic, or labor market influences in their communities, several shared common successes and barriers to guiding returning citizens into gainful employment and self-sufficiency. Interestingly, many shared that the most common facilitators to success related to some of the least tangible or quantifiable aspects to their work—building trust and relationships, fostering vocational mindsets, and encouraging confidence and

empowerment. Noting that most enter their programs having never had a consistent family or community champion, helping participants see their value, both personally and professionally, was viewed as critical to participants' success in the program, and also in the workforce.

Below is an in-depth review of the four primary service delivery and collaboration aspects to REO grantee work. For each, there is a brief foundational discussion of select existing literature and research on that topic that informs high-performing REO program work, followed by a synthesis of grantee reflections and recommendations for future practice, policy, and research consideration.

Assessment and Individualized Services

Guiding Literature

As with other human service practices, clients in the reentry realm face varied and often complex barriers that lead to their imprisonment and often carry forward and even intensify upon release. Reentry programs face tough decisions with scarce resources to target services to maximize their impact. In the reentry field there is ample literature and research discussing the importance of using a risk-need-responsivity (RNR) approach that not only accounts for these resource limitations, but also ensures programs individualize approaches and offer the unique set of services each participant needs to successfully re-assimilate. This research-supported concept is echoed in the work of REO grantees as they apply its framework to meet their programs' needs and interests.

The RNR approach to prisoner reentry services was first introduced in 1990 by Andrews, Bonta, and Hoge. In their seminal article "Classification for effective rehabilitation: Rediscovering psychology study" they surmised that effective reentry programming must match the level and type of service delivery to the level of recidivism risk and the needs of each participant. They based this conclusion on the belief that criminal behavior is learned within a social context, and that participants' criminogenic risks and needs stem from modeling antisocial behaviors within social groups. To counter the antisocial influences and behaviors that lead to crime, they concluded that effective services must:

- **Risk:** Match the level of service intensity to recidivism risk.
- **Need:** Target needs that are related to criminal behavior.
- **Responsivity:** Match service delivery to the returning citizen's personality and learning style.

Since then, numerous studies have assessed the approach in the reentry context and found that it lowers recidivism rates.^{25,26} A meta-analysis of over 300 studies found that social service programs that address criminogenic need in adults were more effective in reducing recidivism, especially for higher risk offenders, than other types of services. Programs that adhered to principles that identify risks and needs and provide RNR averaged a 50% reduction in



²⁵ Loung, D., & Wormith, J. S. (2011). Applying risk/need assessment to probation practice and its impact on the recidivism of young offenders. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 38, 1177–1199.

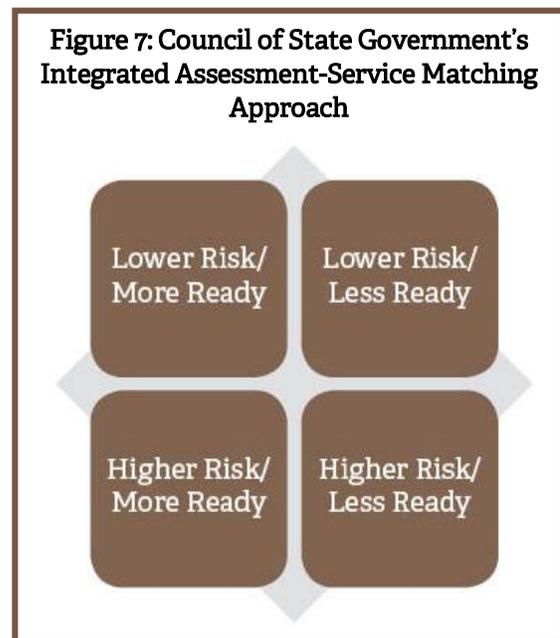
²⁶ Vieira, T. A., Skilling, T. A., & Peterson-Badali, M. (2009). Matching court-ordered services with treatment needs. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 36, 385–401.

recidivism.^{27,28} Similarly, studies of RNR-type intervention planning for young people also show promise, finding that recidivism drops when services are offered according to each young person's risk level and matched to specific criminogenic needs. The match, studies found, was a critical variable—supporting the importance of linking treatment and services to empirical risk assessment data.²⁹

Recently, the Council of State Governments (CSG), supported by the RNR literature preceding it, integrated those principles into a foundational resource-allocation and service-matching tool that encourages employment and justice reentry providers to assess recidivism risk, service needs, and employment readiness together so they can triage resources accordingly. CSG's approach calls for programs to use evidence-based assessments to determine risk and need, then sort returning citizens into one of four service delivery categories, as shown at Figure 7.³⁰

The CSG and RNR approaches have influenced and informed REO grantee strategies in assessing participants, and individualizing services for them. The REO programs interviewed are also beginning to consider how growing neuroscience and psychology literature bases, which illustrate the long-term effects trauma and exposure to violence can have on children and adults, may also inform their assessment and service delivery practices.

Studies show that the majority of young people and adults who become involved in the justice system have faced serious adversities and traumatic experiences, including exposure to community and family violence.³¹ The frequency of this exposure and the absence of caregivers or family to buffer it, research suggests, can affect how we think and interact with peers and in our communities.³² Specifically, research on child and adolescent brain development shows the harm these traumatic and adverse experiences can cause, affecting an individual's executive functioning skills, which include working memory, self-control, and task



²⁷ Andrews, D. A., & Dowden, C. (2006) Risk principle of case classification in correctional treatment: A meta-analytic investigation. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 50, 88–100.

²⁸ Dowden, C., & Andrews, D. A. (1999). What works for female offenders: a meta-analytic review. *Crime and Delinquency*, 45, 438–452.

²⁹ See Vincent, G. M., Guy, L. S., & Grisso, T. (2012). *Risk assessment in juvenile justice: A guidebook for implementation*. Systems and Psychosocial Advances Research Center Publications and Presentations Paper 573. John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The guidebook discusses Lipsey, M. W. (2009). The primary factors that characterize effective interventions with juvenile offenders: A meta-analytic overview. *Victims & Offenders*, 4, 124–147; and Vieira, T. A., Skilling, T. A., & Peterson-Badali, M. (2009). Matching court-ordered services with treatment needs. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 36, 385–401.

³⁰ Duran et al., 2013.

³¹ Listenbee, R. L., Torre, J., Boyle, G., Cooper, S. W., Deer, S., Durfee, D. T., & Taguba, A. (2012). *Defending childhood: Report of the Attorney General's national task force on children exposed to violence*. Retrieved from

<http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/defendingchildhood/legacy/2012/12/12/cev-executive-sum.pdf>; see also Wiig, J., Widom, C. S., & Tuell, J. A. (2003). *Understanding Child Maltreatment and Juvenile Delinquency: From Research to Effective Program, Practice, and Systemic Solutions*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America, Inc.; and Hawkins, J. D., Herrenkohl, T. I., Farrington, D. P., Brewer, D., Catalano, R. F., Harachi, T. W., & Cothorn, L. (2000). *Predictors of Youth Violence*. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*.

³² Listenbee et al., 2012.

prioritization and initiation.³³⁻³⁶ As our knowledge of how trauma impacts neurobiological development grows, the need to translate it into direct service practice, including in the reentry domain, is of increasing import.

REO Program Reflections and Observations

The five high-performing grantees interviewed use comprehensive assessment processes to determine risks and strengths across employment, education, and other arenas. Each then uses assessment results to target service delivery to individualized needs. Program staff often begin by gathering as much information as possible from previously administered assessments, including those administered within correctional facilities. While in-prison assessment data has proven difficult for all the programs to access, they shared the value this information could hold in helping them shape service delivery and avoid duplicative efforts.

Accessing Previous Assessments

Through its strong partnerships with local correctional facilities, OIC-SFL has been able to access limited post-conviction risk assessment results from prison facilities, which it then uses to identify early service delivery needs as participants enter work release. OIC-SFL shared that this 'starting point' helps guide their deeper assessment of current risk, and helps them work with probation partners on realistic expectations and the identification of viable career pathways. Working with justice-involved youth, Connection Training Services (CTS) also seeks out past assessments from partner agencies, using some of their early participant interview time to ask participants about past service providers and administered assessments. For example, as part of their interview protocol CTS staff ask incoming youth whether and when they have previously taken the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE), before administering it or other assessment processes. CTS observed that this 'pre-work' is appreciated by participants, helping avoid participant frustration during initial engagement and increasing efficiencies in staff time.

Using a Range of Assessment Tools

Interviewed grantees use a range of instruments that are either developed in-house or accessed from outside vendors. Many are research-validated, formal instruments that are also used across REO grantee cohorts and programs. All interviewees, for example, use the TABE to assess participants' education level and a career interest inventory such as "My Next Move" to see what types of jobs

Figure 8: Assessing Criminogenic Risk

OIC-SFL uses the Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (LS/CMI) to assess criminogenic risk. The LS/CMI has 43 items that measure general risk and need factors, such as:

- Criminal history
- Education and employment history
- Family and marital background
- Leisure and recreation activities
- Companions
- Substance abuse
- Pro-criminal attitudes
- Antisocial patterns

Scores on the LS/CMI range from 1-6, with scores of 1-2 noting low risk, 3-4 medium risk, and 5-6 high risk.

³³ Shonkoff, J. P., Boyce, W. T., & McEwen, B. S. (2009). Neuroscience, molecular biology, and the childhood roots of health disparities: building a new framework for health promotion and disease prevention. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 301, 2252–2259.

³⁴ Felitti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D. F., Spitz, A. M., Edwards, V., et al. (1998). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: The adverse childhood experiences (ACE) study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14(4), 245–258.

³⁵ Steinberg, L. (2014). *Age of opportunity: Lessons from the new science of adolescence*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing. Retrieved from <http://www.laurencesteinberg.com/books/age-of-opportunity>

³⁶ Finkelhor, D., Turner, H. A., Hamby, S. L., & Ormrod, R.K. (2011). Polyvictimization: Children's exposure to multiple types of violence, crime, and abuse (NCJ 235504). *OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin: OJJDP National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence Series*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

might fit their personality and interests.³⁷ A few programs, such as The Dannon Project and OIC-SFL, also use assessments to determine participants' level of criminogenic risk and work readiness such as the Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (LS/CMI) (see Figure 8) and Accuvision (which assesses employability and soft skill competencies).

OIC-SFL uses a modified version of the CSG model for classifying participants' risk level. At weekly staff meetings, the LS/CMI score (Figure 8) of participants who recently completed intake are reviewed in combination with the evidence-based Accuvision assessment, measuring 14 critical workplace behaviors. OIC-SFL uses Accuvision results to identify soft skill weaknesses that may require extra job readiness coaching. This helps the team assess participant employment readiness against criminogenic risk, from which staff identify whether participants are: (1) low criminogenic risk, high work readiness; (2) low risk, low readiness; (3) high risk, high readiness; or (4) high risk, low readiness. This classification guides the development of service delivery plans. For example, if a participant is high risk with low readiness, then program staff will place him in an entry-level job to become acclimated to the workplace while he is completing an industry-recognized credential. A lower risk participant with high readiness may be able to start work more quickly in a higher skilled position.

At The Dannon Project, program staff use a list of 10 risk indicators to determine whether a participant has high, medium, or low criminogenic need. Staff do not have a formal system for determining whether participants receive high, medium, or low services, stemming from this assessment, but have found that their mix of risk assessment results and informal information gathering frequently leads participants down one of several service intensity paths. Hence, while their approach to translating assessment information into a case plan is less systematic, staff reported that it results in a natural progression of the highest need customers receiving the most intensive services. Those with limited education, socialization, and family supports, often receive more intensive services, while those who have finished high school and some post-secondary schooling, have documented work skills, and have some family support typically need less.

Individualizing Approaches with Similar Service Option Menus

Across interviewed programs, the types of services participants received varied based on need, but the menu of options was similar, including training and credentialing in select high growth job sectors, adult basic education and General Educational Development (GED) supports, mentoring (group and individual), soft skills, tutoring, transportation and referrals for mental health, substance abuse, housing and child care supports. Volunteers of America Greater Los Angeles further customized that menu, designating a specialized case manager for participants with the highest needs. This dedicated case manager carries a reduced caseload of eight participants at a time,



compared to the typical 25. Many in this specialized caseload served 20 or more years in prison and have limited educational or employment experience. Recognizing the need to stabilize and motivate first, the case manager provides up front and intensive supports that focus on getting participants socially and emotionally ready for work, while also helping remove seemingly straightforward barriers—such as getting an identification or social security card—that often pose significant hurdles for returning citizens seeking employment. Participants can move on and off this caseload as challenges are overcome or new ones arise.

³⁷ See <https://www.onetonline.org/help/onet/mynextmove>

Combining Assessment Data with Staff Discretion

All high-performing interviewed programs use numerous instruments to assess participant capacities, interests, and risks. They also offer individualized services (either systematically or through the natural progression of case plan development) that draw upon a mix of in-house supports and strong community partnerships. When discussing what they believed were the key elements to their success, leadership across programs echoed the research base in RNR principles, noting the importance of mixing quantitative assessment data with the professional discretion and the observations of their staff. Several reflected that data alone doesn't always get to the heart of a participant's immediate needs or barriers to fully engaging in the program. Staff from The Dannon Project shared that for adults just exiting prison, as well as new youth participants, asking simple, yet often forgotten questions first is essential—like when the participant last ate or where she slept last night. They shared that without identifying and addressing those basic needs first, further assessment and ultimate service delivery will fail.

Interviewed participants also reaffirmed the importance of staff's informal information gathering approaches that participants felt helped build trust and confidence. Most noted that they never had personal or professional champions in their corners—genuine engagement and concern, participants felt, made all the difference, but also opened the door for them to share more difficult aspects of their past (or present) that might impede their success in the program.

Understanding and Addressing Trauma

While a few of the interviewed programs, through their initial assessments, would ask questions about often complicated family histories and past experiences that may reveal prior exposures to trauma, none had the tools to fully identify or address these issues. Connection Training Services noted that while it has considered taking trauma histories, the program does not have the resources to support staff and participants in addressing what they find. The Dannon Project and

OIC-SFL have both begun to explore trauma-informed principles (see Figure 9), hosting initial trainings for staff and seeking additional ways to infuse the framework into their organizational cultures and case-level work. Human Resource Development Foundation, also serving youth, noted that while their assessment data and case file notes suggest that a majority of their young participants have experienced traumatic pasts, they have not yet had the resources to help address them. The program is looking into outside funding to help it become trauma-informed.

Recommendations

Trauma is a factor for virtually all returning citizens stemming from experiences before, during, and after incarceration.³⁸ As the science of stress and brain development expands, it illustrates how these traumas stay with us into adulthood and inhibit our ability to adapt to changing life circumstances. Trauma-

Figure 9: Trauma-Informed Care

Becoming trauma-informed includes organizational level changes, as well as infusing new interventions into the service delivery infrastructure. According to the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, a trauma-informed approach can be implemented in any type of service setting and reflects an adherence to principles that support participant safety, build trustworthiness and peer supports, is culturally and historically sensitive, and empowers participant voices.¹ At its core, the approach provides programs with a framework to understand the impacts of trauma, recognize its signs (both in participants and staff), respond in practice and policy, and ensure individuals aren't re-traumatized in the process.

Source:

<http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions>

³⁸ Dierkhising, C. B., Ko, S., & Halladay Goldman, J. (2013). *Trauma-informed juvenile justice roundtable: Current issues and directions in creating trauma-informed juvenile justice systems*. Los Angeles, CA & Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

informed approaches can be infused into any program's service setting with the right tools, training, and support. High-performing REO programs are beginning to explore these opportunities to help participants heal from wounds that may otherwise derail their successful return.

High-performing programs also understand that trust takes time to build and is a key component to fully assessing participant needs. Interviewed programs don't underestimate the importance of relationship building combined with data collection and processes that naturally (or more systematically) direct individuals to the services they need. Motivation, encouragement, and genuine engagement were also key in the minds of participants, many of whom had never had champions in their corners. It is from these reflections that the Department of Labor and policymakers should:

- **Support REO programs with strong systems and practices that assess and individualize services:** A one-size-fits-all approach to employment-focused reentry services runs the risk of expending limited program resources where they are not needed, or worse, derailing a participant's progress by demanding too much of their time or providing insufficient support. Future REO applicants should be scored on their ability to demonstrate that they have the systems and tools in place to comprehensively assess participants' criminogenic risk, skills, interests, and barriers, and to individualize services based on their assessment.
- **Build capacity for FBCOs to access and use research-validated assessment instruments:** High-performing REO programs are using an eclectic mix of assessment instruments—some of which are research-validated or developed by the federal government, and some that were developed in-house. To optimize the accuracy and usefulness of these tools, FBCOs could use guidance on how to identify and select research-validated and credible assessment tools based on their program's target population and program design, and how to train and support program staff in the use and interpretation of these instruments.
- **Build capacity for FBCO programs to become trauma-informed:** Despite the high incidence of trauma among youth and adults involved in the justice system, many FBCOs serving this population do not have a trauma-informed program with appropriately trained staff. Further, as new research emerges on the impact of stress on the developing brain as well as on adults' brains, FBCOs could benefit from expert guidance on how to integrate lessons from this research into their systems and services. Executive functioning impairment can decrease not only employment success but program retention. There is likely more FBCOs can be doing to mitigate the impact of toxic stress and to empower survivors of traumatic experiences.

Pre-Release Services and Justice System Collaborations

Guiding Literature

The majority of people who enter prison are poor and, in turn, incarceration often increases the likelihood of continued poverty by reducing earning potential, creating significant additional employment barriers, and making access to some types of public assistance difficult or impossible.³⁹ Many falter under the logistical and substantive barriers of reentry; within three years of release as many as two-thirds are rearrested, within five, as many as three-quarters.⁴⁰

³⁹ Center for Community Change. (n.d.). *The relationship between poverty and mass incarceration*. Retrieved from http://nationinside.org/images/pdf/The_Relationship_between_Poverty_and_Mass_Incarceration.pdf

⁴⁰ National Institute of Justice. (2014). *Recidivism*. Retrieved from <http://www.nij.gov/topics/corrections/recidivism/Pages/welcome.aspx>

Research also suggests that the complicated and often varied factors that lead to criminal behavior are ones that require a mix of internal motivators and external supports to overcome.⁴¹ Research suggests that pre-release training, education, and case management can have a positive effect on post-release wages and reduce recidivism. Pre-release education programs administered by prison facilities, for example, have been linked to lower recidivism rates. Often consisting of adult basic education, GED preparation, and vocational training, multiple meta-analyses show that completing adult basic



education or vocational courses while incarcerated lowers the risk of recidivism by as much as 24 percent.⁴² In addition, a 2013 RAND meta-analysis of 18 quasi-experimental studies found that the odds of obtaining employment post-release were 13 percent higher for those who had completed a correctional education program than those who had not. But, because these studies did not use rigorous study designs, RAND recommended further research that applies stronger research designs, measures program dosage, identifies program characteristics, and measures how correctional education programs affect thinking and behavior.⁴³

Pilot studies assessing intensive pre-release case management have also shown promise. Using a randomized experimental study design, the Minnesota Comprehensive Offender Reentry pilot used prison-based case managers with small caseloads to offer intensive supports, which included motivational interviewing techniques and realistic goal-setting processes. Study participants who received these more frequent and intensive supports had lower recidivism rates than the control group.⁴⁴ A similar 2015 randomized control trial conducted by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections assessed a “reach-in” reentry program that included six months of intensive case management prior to release. That study found intervention participants experienced an increase in median earnings that sustained past the first six months, and decreased recidivism during the first year.⁴⁵

Following this line of research, high-performing REO programs consistently seek out enhanced partnership opportunities with correction departments to identify and engage potential participants in pre-release. They see this time as essential to ready participants for work and the other diverse pressures of return. As the literature supports, this early engagement not only eases the emotional transition in reentry, but places participants on employment paths that can increase their capacity to secure jobs and avoid future justice system involvement.

⁴¹ See, e.g., Bushway, S. D., & Paternoster, R. (2014). Desistance from Crime. In *Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice* (pp. 967–978). Springer New York; Steinberg, L., Cauffman, E., & Monahan, K. C. (2015). *Psychosocial maturity and desistance from crime in a sample of serious juvenile offenders* (Vol. 75). Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Retrieved from <http://www.nij.gov/topics/corrections/recidivism/Pages/welcome.aspx>

⁴² Davis, L. M., Steele, J. L., Bozick, R., Williams, M. V., Turner, S., Miles, J. N. V., Saunders, J., & Steinberg, P. S. (2014). *How effective is correctional education, and where do we go from here?* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR500/RR564/RAND_RR564.pdf

⁴³ Davis et al., 2014.

⁴⁴ Duwe, G. (2013). *An evaluation of the Minnesota comprehensive offender reentry plan (MCORP) pilot project: Final report*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Department of Corrections. Retrieved from https://www.doc.state.mn.us/pages/files/8913/8142/3580/MCORP_Evaluation_Final_DOC_Website.pdf

⁴⁵ Cook, P. J., Kang, S., Braga, A. A., Ludwig, J., & O'Brien, M. E. (2015). An experimental evaluation of a comprehensive employment-oriented prisoner re-entry program. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 31, 355–382.

REO Program Reflections and Observations

All high-performing REO programs interviewed regularly meet with and engage prison and work release facilities to maintain a pipeline of referrals to their programs, as well as to ensure coordination across systems as individuals move from prison to work release to community. Several leverage these relationships to identify and engage potential program participants as early as six to nine months pre-release. They begin to engage participants earlier to help prepare them to succeed in the work release facility and after, focusing on employment readiness skills, building trust, and identifying barriers, such as getting a driver's license or identification card, paying child support, or obtaining housing.

Offering Training and Services Pre-Release

REO programs that engage participants pre-release, such as OIC-SFL and The Dannon Project, shared that this pre-release engagement also develops individuals' internal capacities and motivators that ultimately change mindsets and ready individuals to seek out and retain work. As a result, they offer strength-based supports and soft skills training, with heavy emphases on building job readiness skills. OIC-SFL, for example, builds participants' vocational mindsets through soft and cognitive skills training to help them connect their behaviors to their beliefs and assess their job readiness. Additional supports they offer in pre-release include practical applications of these skills, such as resume preparation or managing application processes with a conviction.

Accessing Prison Facilities

Pre-release training and assessment work requires strong collaboration with local correctional facilities. Both The Dannon Project and OIC-SFL have invested considerable effort into partnerships with correctional facilities that allow this access, but which facilities they are able to enter depends on the facilities' knowledge of their program and their relationship with correctional officers and wardens, often with no formal agreements in place. The Dannon Project and OIC-SFL have also faced challenges while working inside facilities. Unpredictable lockdowns can make it difficult for program staff to maintain training schedules, and many facilities have strict rules about computer and internet access for inmates.

The latter presents a challenge for most REO programs, which use a mix of internet-based training and in-person instruction. The Dannon Project, therefore, brings their own computers into prisons on a weekly basis so they can offer training and assessments. Unable to negotiate internet access with facilities, staff download onto the computers as much material as they can to administer assessments onsite. Conversely, OIC-SFL is not permitted to bring computers into secure facilities. Instead, they print out assessments and training materials and work from hard copies. When they return to the office, staff manually enters answers into web-based assessment tools to run reports. They will then follow up with inmates a few days later to discuss results.

"Inmates are grateful for the attention and look forward to our return. We develop relationships inside that continue after release. We talk to them about getting clothes, housing, and an ID and what their work interests and capacities are. After release, we work with them to realize those goals, further solidifying our relationship, and their enthusiasm about work. Pre-release is the beginning of their training...helping us set a precedent for how to come home."

Vanessa Brown, Reentry Director, The Dannon Project

Coordinating with Work Release Facilities

REO program engagement increases in work release where programs aim to place participants on training paths that increase their capacity to secure credentials that support progression into higher wage jobs. This focus on career progression and stackable credentials, however, is often difficult to maintain as eligible participants enter work release facilities. In many work release facilities,

residents must be employed within three weeks and contribute toward room and board costs or face re-incarceration. As a result, many participants simply take the first job they can find, often at minimum wage with little chance for career development. These work-first policies, REO staff shared, complicate REO programs' training delivery, which must adjust to participant work schedules. Unable to negotiate less stringent requirements, high-performing REO programs, such as The Dannon Project and OIC-SFL, find their pre-release work even more critical to begin training assessments and address the immediate demands placed on participants.

Figure 10: Diverting Young People from the Deep End of the Justice System

REO programs that serve youth are often designated as diversion programs, receiving pre-adjudication referrals directly from juvenile courts. The Dannon Project, Human Resource Development Foundation, and Connection Training Services (CTS) operate these programs, having created formal Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with courts to maintain these referral streams, working regularly with probation staff to align services, and in some instances having dedicated court advocates who cultivate these relationships and help guide young people through the court system. Staff from these programs resoundingly shared the great value and impact these early interventions can have, with some, like CTS, seeking additional ways to reach young people even before court involvement.

- **Forging strong relationships with courts and probation officers:** Philadelphia's CTS has formal MOUs with family court judges to refer potential youth participants to their program pre-adjudication. Staff ensures regular communication with the court and probation officers (POs) by attending court with young people and sending regular written reports to judges and POs on young people's progress.
- **Using advocates to help translate the court process:** To provide young people support during the court process and help translate what are often foreign terms, concepts, and demands, The Dannon Project has dedicated court advocate staff that help young people navigate the court system and understand what is expected of them. Staff shared that many, even as young as 14, don't have family attending court with them and are not able to understand what the court orders. Legal advocates, who can carry hundreds of cases a year,⁴⁶⁻⁴⁸ aren't always able to spend the time necessary for young people to fully comprehend the process or expectations. Dedicated court advocate services have become invaluable in ensuring young people know their rights and responsibilities.
- **Avoiding justice system involvement all together:** While outside the purview of the REO grant, CTS seeks ways to reach young people before any involvement in the court system, understanding that any system involvement can traumatize and increase the likelihood of deeper justice system engagement.⁴⁹ CTS is cultivating relationships in schools, as well as with law enforcement and individual beat cops to refer at-risk youth or those arrested on minor infractions to help young people avoid the justice system entirely.

Recommendations

While a few high-performing REO programs have provided services to participants pre-release, they often face challenges in accessing prison facilities, obtaining pre-release data about participants, and then coordinating with work release to balance their work-first expectations with REO programs' credentialing and career pathway opportunities. These hurdles present important opportunities for improved coordination across prison, work release, and REO programs. Improved policies and models of engagement with the criminal justice system are needed to better integrate REO program pre-release services. Such integration would help in overcoming common challenges by allowing

⁴⁶ Thureau, L., & Goldberg, S. (2012). *National juvenile defense standards*. Washington, DC: National Juvenile Defender Center. Retrieved from <http://njdc.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/NationalJuvenileDefenseStandards2013.pdf>

⁴⁷ Thomas-Whitfield, C. (2011). *Overloaded public defense systems jeopardizing fairness of justice system, report finds*. Retrieved from <http://jjie.org/overloaded-public-defense-systems-jeopardizing-fairness-of-justice-system-report-finds/>

⁴⁸ McCarthy, K. (2013). An overwhelmed judicial system: A day in the life of a public defender. Retrieved from <http://jjie.org/in-california-a-day-in-the-life-of-a-juvenile-public-defender-and-his-clients/105838/>

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Dierkhising et al., 2013.

more programs to access inmates early and begin training and case management services that complement existing correctional training supports and ease the transition to work release.

Which prisons REO programs are able to enter often depends on their relationship with correctional officers and wardens. To improve access, state and federal justice systems should:

- **Increase opportunities for employment-focused FBCO reentry programs to formalize relationships with prison facilities:** Without formal agreements in place, access to facilities is dependent on relationships between FBCO programs and facility staff. With inevitable turnover, programs must frequently educate (and re-educate) staff about their services and value-add to existing job training in correction facilities. Forging new partnerships and maintaining current ones requires significant time and attention that could be reduced, while the partnerships themselves are strengthened through formal agreements between systems.
- **Improve facility access:** Most REO programs use a mix of web-based training and in-person instruction, the former of which requires computer and internet access. But many prison facilities have few or no computers accessible to inmates and/or no internet access. These technology challenges create inefficiencies for over-taxed service providers. DOL and criminal justice systems may wish to explore pilot programs that allow or increase internet service in controlled settings where work-readiness and employment services are made available through FBCO partners.
- **Ensure REO programs know who is moving into work release:** For those REO programs that provide pre-release services, they aren't always clear which inmates will be entering work release and are thus eligible for DOL's REO program. Last minute reassignments or changes may result in offering pre-release supports to inmates who they can't continue to serve and/or missing a window of opportunity with individuals who will ultimately enter work release. Programs regularly check in with facilities, as well as use word of mouth with corrections staff and reentry community stakeholders to try and confirm which inmates will move into work release.
- **Support leniency or relief from work and restitution payment requirements:** Greater flexibility to pursue credential attainment over minimum wage work during work release would also allow more REO programs to offer multiple credentialing opportunities that improve participants' career trajectories. While many REO programs are interested in offering multiple stackable credentials, most are unable to do so. As participants enter work release, most are required to find employment and make restitution payments within three weeks of entry. Facing potential re-incarceration, many residents take the first job they find, often at minimum wage and with little career advancement opportunities. As a result, REO programs aren't always able to offer a full complement of training supports. Flexibility in these expectations could increase the likelihood that participants pursue meaningful, wage-increasing careers.

Career Pathways

Guiding Literature

The effects of the Great Recession continue to reverberate in the American economy, particularly for low-skilled workers. At the Recession's height, the major spikes in unemployment were in "blue collar" professions such as manufacturing (15.5 percent at its peak) as opposed to "white collar" (6.7 percent) and the "service industry" (10.7 percent).⁵⁰ The economic recovery has continued to trend

⁵⁰ Economic Policy Institute. (2015). *Unemployment rates of workers by job category, 1973-2014* [chart]. Retrieved from <http://www.stateofworkingamerica.org/charts/unemployment-job-category/>

away from manufacturing jobs and toward the intellectual services economy. Despite a large pool of unemployed and underemployed workers, there continues to be a mismatch between supply and demand. The largest gaps fall with middle-skills jobs, which include growing industries such as advanced manufacturing, construction, and healthcare, as well as high-skills careers in fields like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and require at least an undergraduate degree. Low-skilled workers in traditional blue collar industries are in the least demand.⁵¹

Career pathways (see Figure 11) represent a potentially effective strategy for strengthening employment outcomes for low-skilled individuals. Developed over the past decade, career pathways are designed to provide a comprehensive framework of developmental and vocational education and supportive services for low-skilled, low-income individuals.⁵² Career pathway programs tend to provide training that results in industry-recognized credentials for local, in-demand occupations. Supportive services that accompany career pathway training is often designed to boost retention and advancement for individuals with educational deficits and other barriers to employment—potentially including returning citizens. Unlike other models, career pathway programs require significant coordination and collaboration between training providers, community colleges, supportive service providers, and employers to provide a pathways program that is efficient and easy to navigate.⁵³

To date, there are no completed, rigorous impact studies on a comprehensive career pathways model for returning citizens or for the general low-skilled population. The first national evaluation of career pathways programs—the Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education study—is underway until 2017. Nevertheless, several sector-based programs that include key components of the career pathways approach have shown promise. The Sectoral Employment Impact Study led by Public/Private Ventures in 2009 provided vocational training aligned with employer needs and projected local demand and offered individualized supportive services to support training completion and success on the job. Although the study was not focused on returning citizens, participants had significant employment barriers and 22 percent of the participants had criminal records.⁵⁴ The study found that the treatment group earned 18.3 percent more than the control group over the 24 month study period, were more likely to work and (in the second year) worked more consistently than the control group.⁵⁵ Similarly, the Work Advancement and Support Center demonstration project was piloted and evaluated from 2005–2010 and offered intensive employment retention and advancement services for low-skilled workers. The randomized control trial found that due to an increased receipt of funds for training, participants were significantly more likely to complete certification programs and obtain higher wages—eight percent higher than the control group.

In 2013, DOL began requiring adult-serving REO grantees to take a career pathways approach to

Figure 11: Characteristics of Career Pathways

Career Pathways share common features:

- **Sector strategy:** Training that aligns with local labor market needs.
- **Stackable credentials:** The opportunity to earn a series of industry-recognized credentials that advance one along a career pathway.
- **Multiple entry and exit points:** Individuals can start at different points and can advance to varying levels based on their individual needs, interests, and abilities.

⁵¹ National Federation of Independent Businesses. (2016). *March 2016 Report: Small Business Economic Trends*. Retrieved from <http://www.nfib.com/surveys/small-business-economic-trends/>

⁵² Werner A., Rappaport, C. D., Stuart, J. B., & Lewis, J. (2013). *Literature review: Career pathways programs*. OPRE Report #2013-24. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/cp_lit_review_final_62613_edits.pdf

⁵³ Gash, A., & Mack, M. (2010). *Career ladders and pathways for the hard-to-employ*. Career Ladders Project: Issue Brief. Retrieved from <http://www.careerladdersproject.org/docs/Issue%20Brief.pdf>

⁵⁴ Maguire, S., Freely, J., Clymer, C., & Conway, M. (2009). *Job Training that Works: Findings from the Sectoral Employment Impact Study*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures, 2009. Retrieved from <http://www.insightcced.org/uploads/nnsfp/job-training-that-works.pdf>

⁵⁵ Maguire et al., 2009.

their services, establishing a Career Pathways Collaborative (CPC) that involves the local workforce development board(s), community college(s), and employers. Programs have been tasked with using local labor market information (LMI) and input from employers to map out career pathway options viable for returning citizens and for helping program participants advance along those paths, obtaining industry-recognized credentials and employment in high-growth occupations.

REO Program Reflections and Observations

High-performing REO grantees place significant emphasis on using local LMI to select training programs and credentials offered to program participants. Over the years, interviewed programs dropped and added new courses as demand for specific occupations shifted in their communities. They also invest considerable staff time in employer engagement—visiting work sites, making regular phone calls, and leveraging employer advisory boards to obtain input on participant performance, discuss the practical value of the training/credential offerings, and identify projected hiring needs.

All of the adult-serving REO programs interviewed also use assessment data to identify potential career pathways that align with participant interests and abilities. Case managers and job developers shared average wage information with participants, along with the training and credentialing requirements for entry and advancement along the selected career pathway. Case managers included goals related to the selected career pathway in each participant’s individual career plan. Each program also uses incentives—financial and material—to encourage training completion and credential attainment.

Figure 12: Common Credential Offerings by High-Performing REO Programs

- Construction and skilled trades, such as plumbing, weatherization, and electrical work
- Warehouse and logistics, including forklift training
- Commercial driving and trucking
- Culinary arts
- Automotive repair
- Customer service
- Information technology

Career Pathways Collaborative

As discussed above, recent recipients of adult-focused REO grants are required to create a CPC. While visiting OIC-SFL, ICF observed a CPC meeting that included representatives from the local Workforce Development Board, state and federal prisons, the probation office, a work release facility, legal aid, and a substance abuse treatment program. The CPC provides a degree of oversight for the project; the OIC-SFL team briefed the CPC on key performance metrics (discussing target versus actual enrollment, training completion, and credential attainment rates) and discussed potential solutions to challenges confronting program implementation. Volunteers of America Greater Los Angeles asks their CPC to play a similar role in oversight and leadership. Their Director of Evaluation prepares monthly project monitoring reports for their CPC. Further, several REO programs shared that the CPC structure had led to stronger working relationships with key local stakeholders.

Career Pathway Maps

Although all of the high-performing REO grantees use LMI data and employer input to select their training and credential offerings, not all grantees have developed well-articulated career pathway maps that clearly spell out what credentials are required and what wages can be expected across the pathway. OIC-SFL has developed these career pathway maps, and their case managers and job developers walk participants through them shortly after intake and assessment are complete (see Appendix E for a sample career pathway map from OIC-SFL). Staff report that the maps serve an important educational and aspirational function for participants, enabling them to develop a stronger vocational self-concept and realistic expectations for the time and effort required for advancement.

Advancing along a Career Pathway

One of the goals in articulating a well-defined career pathway is enabling disadvantaged workers to gain the necessary skills and advance toward higher paying, higher skill occupations. Moving an individual along a career pathway can take considerable time—particularly for those individuals who begin the program deficient in basic skills or lacking a high school diploma or equivalency. OIC-SFL expressed concern that the two-year operational period of performance in REO grants was not sufficient to enroll, train, place, and then further upskill participants. Across the REO programs interviewed, most participants only obtained one credential and did not move to a second or third level credential during the grant period.



Another challenge inherent in the career pathway advancement model is that of changing interests. Many REO programs serve returning citizens who have limited work experience and may not yet know where their occupational interests and strengths lie. A few focus group participants who did complete multiple credentials seemed to jump from one pathway to another—attaining a culinary arts certificate first, and then pursuing a commercial driver’s license. Although both certifications may open up employment opportunities for an individual, changing fields can delay career progression.

Recommendations

Career pathways represent a promising innovation in workforce development for low-skilled, low-income individuals and may be valuable for returning citizens and justice-involved youth. To continue to build the knowledge base around using a career pathways approach for these populations, the Department of Labor should:

- **Invest in additional research on the career pathways model as it pertains to returning citizens and justice-involved youth:** New research should focus on the implementation and impact of employment-based reentry programs that closely align career pathway options with high-growth, high-demand occupations in their local communities and who help returning citizens advance along that pathway by obtaining more than one stackable, portable industry-recognized credential.
- **Extend the period of performance for the REO grants:** Allowing programs to work with participants over a longer period would enable them to support second or third-level credential attainment. For instance, the period of performance for recent Training to Work grants includes a 6-month planning period, 24 months of operations and a 9-month follow-up period. A longer period of performance could split the operations period into two distinct segments: 18 months for enrollment and Tier I credentialing, followed by an additional 12 months for Tier II or Tier III credentialing prior to moving into follow-up.

Mentoring

Guiding Literature

Public/Private Ventures designed and launched Ready4Work—the first employment-based reentry initiative supported by DOL preceding the REO grants—on the heels of their landmark impact study of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. The 1995 study of Big Brothers Big Sisters was the first major experimental evaluation of mentoring and it revealed exciting findings. Children and adolescents in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, compared with the control group, were significantly less likely to start using drugs and alcohol, less likely to hit someone, experienced improved school attendance and performance, and improved family and peer relationships.⁵⁶ This study caught the attention of Congress and federal funding for mentoring increased substantially.

One of the central research questions of the Ready4Work pilot was whether mentoring might ease the transition for returning citizens by promoting positive changes in mindset and behavior. Since Ready4Work, every REO grant has included a mentoring component. Despite that investment, there is a significant dearth of high-quality research on mentoring in a reentry context – particularly for adults. Public/Private Ventures found that returning citizens who participated in mentoring as part of the Ready4Work program were more likely to remain in the program, find and retain employment, and were less likely to recidivate.⁵⁷ Because this was an implementation study that did not involve a quasi-experimental or random design component, there is no way to know whether mentoring caused the improved outcomes. The Two-Year Impact Report of the Re-Integration of Ex-Offenders (RExO) program, which included organizations from the first cohort of REO grants, found that the mentoring component was not being executed as intended.⁵⁸ Program participants in the study noted that they preferred group mentoring because it did not require consistent participation. As a result, relatively few participants received one-to-one mentoring; group ‘mentoring’ was typically a staff-facilitated support group.

Limited research has been conducted on mentoring youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Similar to outcomes for mentoring other at-risk groups, mentoring programs for juvenile justice-involved youth have shown inconsistent results.^{59–61} A 2007 meta-analysis of 16 studies on mentoring and reentry found that mentoring reduced reoffending by 4 to 11 percent.⁶² The meta-analysis also found that the effectiveness of mentoring in reducing recidivism was strongest when it was part of a comprehensive approach to helping juvenile offenders make a successful transition. A more recent meta-analysis of 46 studies on mentoring for a broader group of high-risk youth showed modest positive effects for delinquency and academic functioning, with trends suggesting similar benefits for aggression and drug use.⁶³

And yet, other studies raise questions about the effectiveness of mentoring for the highest risk

⁵⁶ Grossman, J. B., Resch, N., & Tierney, J. (1995). *Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.

⁵⁷ Cobbs-Fletcher & Sherk, 2009.

⁵⁸ Wiegand et al., 2015.

⁵⁹ Blechman, E., & Bopp, J. (2005). Juvenile offenders. In D. L. DuBois & M. J. Karcher (Eds.), *Handbook of youth mentoring* (pp. 454–466). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

⁶⁰ Bouffard, J. A., & Bergseth, K. J. (2008). The impact of reentry services on juvenile offenders' recidivism. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 6, 295–318.

⁶¹ Enriquez, A. E., Jr. (2011). *Juvenile system mentoring programs in Bexar county: Referrals and recidivism*. Unpublished master's thesis. University of Texas at San Antonio.

⁶² Jolliffe, D., & Farrington, D. P. (2007). *A rapid evidence assessment of the impact of mentoring on re-offending: A summary*. Home Office Online Report. Retrieved from <http://www.youthmentoring.org.nz/research.cfm#faq132035>

⁶³ Tolan, P., Henry, D., Schoeny, M., Bass, A., Lovegrove, P., & Nichols, E. (2013). Mentoring interventions to affect juvenile delinquency and associated problems: A systematic review, *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 2013(10). Retrieved from <http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/lib/project/48/>

populations. A 2011 study of a mentoring program for youth on probation found that mentoring was not effective with chronic offenders—in fact, finding that those who received mentoring had three times higher arrest rates than those who did not.⁶⁴ Similarly, a 2012 study found that mentoring did not change the trajectory of youth who were referred to the program after they had already started violating their probation.⁶⁵

Confounding these variant results is the fact that most studies on youth mentoring in a reentry context do not provide sufficient detail on how the programs were implemented. The studies do not include an implementation study component, and most do not describe key features of program design or theorized processes of impact.⁶⁶ Without this information, it is challenging for the field to identify what practices are most effective, and for whom.

“Mentoring for juvenile offenders remains today largely a ‘black box’ whose internal processes are poorly understood, despite general optimism about its positive effects.”

Chan & Henry, 2014

REO Program Reflections and Observations

High-performing REO programs all offer a combination of group and one-to-one mentoring. They hire a full-time mentoring coordinator to run their mentoring services. That individual is responsible for mentor recruitment, screening, and training; matching volunteers with participants; and providing ongoing match support. The mentor coordinator is also typically involved in planning, organizing, or even leading the group mentoring sessions.

Implementation Challenges

The challenges of implementing a high-quality mentoring program are well documented.⁶⁷ Even the highest performing REO programs struggled with the following common challenges:

- **Participant interest:** many adults and young adults perceive mentoring as a program for children. Given the many challenges returning citizens face—finding a job, securing housing, reestablishing relationships with family—mentoring is not a priority. Returning citizens are often already checking in with a probation or parole officer, a case manager, and other work release program staff. Participants also worry about confidentiality and are hesitant to trust the mentor’s motivation, particularly if that individual has not had similar life experiences.
- **Retention and participation rates:** even if participants willingly agree to participate in the mentoring component of the program, keeping them engaged can be challenging. Schedules can change as participants move into or out of training programs, obtain employment, or take on childcare responsibilities. When participants don’t show up for mentoring meetings, mentors quickly become discouraged and often leave the program.
- **Mentor recruitment:** virtually all mentoring programs struggle to recruit and retain enough volunteer mentors to match with program participants. This challenge is even more significant when the program focuses on serving youth or adults involved in the justice system. In most communities there is stiff competition for volunteers, and most volunteers feel more comfortable working with children than justice-involved youth or returning citizens.
- **Staffing and capacity:** volunteer-based mentoring is often treated like an add-on to more

⁶⁴ Enriquez, 2011.

⁶⁵ Mitchell, J. M., Barnes, J. C., Miller, H. V., & McKinnon, L. (2012). Exploring the link between mentoring program structure & success rates: Results from a national survey. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 38, 439–456.

⁶⁶ Tolan et al., 2013.

⁶⁷ See, for instance, Fletcher, R.C. & Sherk, J. (2009). *Mentoring former prisoners: A guide for reentry programs*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures. Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecfmentoringformerprisoners-2009.pdf>; or Chan, W. & Henry, D. (2014). Juvenile offenders. In D. L. DuBois & M. J. Karcher. *The SAGE Program on Applied Developmental Science: Handbook of youth mentoring* (pp. 315–324). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

comprehensive and integrated services. As described above, most high-performing REO-funded programs have one appointed staff person running the mentoring program. Although that person communicates regularly with other staff, the program component often isn't fully woven into the case management, job training, or job placement services. If that one staff person leaves, there often isn't a back-up team member to step into the role.

In the face of these challenges, REO grantees often prioritized mentoring services for those participants willing or eager to participate and focused on offering group mentoring services to participants (with or without the involvement of volunteer mentors).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Mentoring

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a short-term, goal-oriented treatment that focuses on shifting the way people think about and approach problems.^{68,69} CBT has been shown to be particularly effective with justice-involved youth and returning citizens, producing improvements in anger management, anxiety, depression, and reducing recidivism rates.^{70,71} Recognizing this, OIC-SFL embeds CBT-based curricula into their pre-release group mentoring program. They have also used CBT principles in their mentor training. Program staff believe that these CBT principles lend needed structure and focus to the group mentoring model and empowers returning citizens to use reflection and other proven techniques to improve their emotional regulation and problem solving capacity.

Case Managers as Navigational Coaches

When asked about their experience with mentors, focus group participants at both OIC-SFL and The Dannon Project responded by talking about their relationships with program staff, not volunteer mentors. Although perhaps anecdotal, most focus group participants did not participate in one-to-one mentoring and reported little engagement in group mentoring sessions. The few participants who were matched with mentors (all youth) had negative or lukewarm feelings about the

"I believe it's not the program, it's the people. The case managers sit down and talk to you to try to get what you need. You have to be driven, and then they'll drive with you [as a co-pilot]. They work with you to get you back where you need to be. The relationship with the staff was monumental."

Adult Focus Group Participant,
OIC-SFL

experience, reporting a lack of interest, connection, and follow-through. All participants, however, were effusive about the impact of their relationships with program staff. They reported high degrees of trust and closeness with their case managers and argued that it was the relationship with staff—above and beyond the training or any other programmatic component—that made their success in the program and later employment possible.

Recommendations

Despite considerable implementation challenges, many practitioners (including REO grantees) are convinced of the value of mentoring in helping justice-involved youth and returning citizens turn their lives in a positive direction. Researchers hypothesize that mentoring relationships characterized by high degrees of mutuality, trust, and empathy affect the socio-emotional, cognitive,

⁶⁸ Dion, M. R., Bradley, M.C., Gothro, A., Bardos, M., Lansing, J., Stagner, M., & Dworsky, A. (2013). *Advancing the self-sufficiency and well-being of at-risk youth: A conceptual framework*. OPRE Report # 2013-13. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/ydd_final_report_3_22_13.pdf

⁶⁹ Martin, B. (2015). *In-depth: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*. PsychCentral. Retrieved from <http://psychcentral.com/lib/in-depth-cognitive-behavioral-therapy/>

⁷⁰ Dion et al., 2013.

⁷¹ MDRC. (2015). *Applying Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to promote positive change*. Issue Focus. Retrieved from http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/appling_cbt_issue_focus.pdf

and identity development of youth.⁷² In a reentry context, researchers have theorized that emotional support, modeling positive behaviors, and facilitating access to community resources may be key mechanisms by which mentoring achieves positive effects on recidivism.⁷³

Researchers recognize, however, that the mechanisms for change that have been tested and demonstrated to work for children or adolescents may be significantly different for adults or young adults in a reentry context. The traditional one-to-one, volunteer-based, developmentally focused mentoring model pioneered by Big Brothers Big Sisters may not be appropriate for this different target population. The infusion of cognitive behavioral therapy principles into mentoring may well be an innovation worth further exploration and evaluation. Although mentoring should by no means be conflated with professional therapy, youth mentoring researchers have long theorized that mentoring is impactful in part because it changes participants' self-concept and introduces new and often healthier methods for dealing with life challenges.⁷⁴ This intentional marrying of CBT principles and mentoring may be a powerful method for harnessing the power of relationships to change thought processes and behaviors.

Re-conceptualizing the role of the case manager to intentionally promote coaching or mentor-like attributes may also be a worthwhile strategy for further exploration. A 2009 study of youth reentry programs found that when youth had balanced relationships with program staff (characterized by high levels of effective problem-solving and closeness to staff), participants scored better than those who did not on the Post-Detention Likelihood to Succeed measure.⁷⁵ Likewise, another study of a program that intentionally cultivated strong mentor-like relationships between case managers and justice-involved youth found that youth receiving this type of case management had significantly lower rates of positive drug tests, a lower risk of recidivism, and fewer official contacts within six months post-release.⁷⁶ Although these results have not been replicated in an adult reentry context, further research might be warranted to assess the impact of intentionally equipping case managers (through training, supervision, and appropriate caseload sizes) to act as coaches and develop the type of positive, empathetic relationships reminiscent of effective mentoring.

Finally, adult reentry mentoring programs may be well served to incorporate a more intentional focus on building social capital. Social capital refers to the collective value of all social networks (who people know) and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other (the norms of reciprocity).⁷⁷ For youth, social capital is critical for a successful transition to adulthood, and for adults, social capital can be critical to career development and general well-being. In the youth mentoring field, a number of programs are looking beyond traditional volunteer mentoring to building the confidence, skills, and networks of youth to cultivate new and additional 'natural' mentoring relationships. For adults and young adults, helping them build their social networks—particularly with professionals in their career paths of interest—may ultimately be more appealing and more impactful than the traditional one-to-one mentoring model developed for children.

"Given the popularity of [youth reentry mentoring], the promise of benefits should be seen as a strong argument for a concerted effort through quality randomized trials to specify the theoretical and practical components for effective mentoring with high-risk youth."

Tolan et al., 2013

⁷² Rhodes, J. E., & DuBois, D. L. (2008). Mentoring relationships and programs for youth. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 17(4), 254–258.

⁷³ Chan & Henry, 2014.

⁷⁴ Rhodes & DuBois, 2008.

⁷⁵ Marsh, S. C. & Evans, W. P. (2009). Youth perspectives on their relationships with staff in juvenile correction settings and perceived likelihood of success on release. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 7, 46–67.

⁷⁶ Bouffard & Bergseth, 2008.

⁷⁷ Harvard Kennedy School (n.d.). *About social capital*. Retrieved from <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/programs/saguaro/about-social-capital>

Additional research is needed to identify and unpack effective mentoring models for justice-involved youth and returning citizens. Researchers need a better understanding of possible mediators that lead to change associated with mentoring. Both researchers and practitioners need to know more about which mentoring strategies are most effective for which populations. To build this knowledge base, the Departments of Labor and Justice should:

- **Invest in piloting and evaluating new and innovative approaches to mentoring justice-involved youth and returning citizens:** Promising mentoring interventions could include the infusion of cognitive behavioral therapy principles into group mentoring and/or a focus on building professional and supportive social networks for participants.
- **Emphasize further research and adoption of best practices in case management:** Effective case management practices could include navigational coaching, motivational interviewing, enhanced support and supervision of case management staff, and smaller caseloads to ensure case managers are able to develop the kind of relationships with participants that promote program retention and advancement.

Conclusion

Research has demonstrated how pervasive trauma and exposure to violence has been in the lives of justice-involved youth and returning citizens.⁷⁸ This kind of exposure—particularly when experienced in childhood—can do significant and lasting damage to the cultivation of specific skills critical to achieving self-sufficiency. New research in the fields of neuroscience and psychology has exposed the impact traumatic childhood experiences—when chronic and unmitigated through consistent adult support—can have on the development of the brain and the functioning of the immune system. Individuals with this exposure can have a more difficult time regulating their emotions, dealing with problems, managing time and competing demands, and learning through traditional auditory methods.^{79,80} The experience of incarceration does little to improve these deficiencies and in fact often further traumatizes individuals with significant mental, physical, and behavioral health challenges.

And yet, the human brain and spirit are remarkably resilient. The skills most impacted by trauma, so-called executive functioning skills, continue to develop well into young adulthood.^{81,82} REO programs demonstrate every day that healing is possible and that returning citizens can achieve remarkable levels of career success and self-sufficiency. This work, however, requires more than strong programs or coordinated

"I will spend as much time as necessary building the best relationships I can with our participants. I want to do everything I can to build their self-esteem and make them feel their worth. That is the most important thing that I do...to make sure this young man or woman feels like they matter."

Bo Johnson, Career Readiness Manager
The Dannon Project

systems. It requires individuals with the right background, training, and "heart" for the work. During this benchmarking study, the majority of interview questions focused on services and systems, yet the consistent theme that arose while talking to staff and to participants was the importance of relationships. Who runs these programs—the staff members who pick up the phone when returning citizens call, who find warm clothing when it's needed, who coach a participant through a difficult family or job situation—may in fact make the difference between an average reentry program and a highly successful one.

⁷⁸ Listenbee et al., 2012.

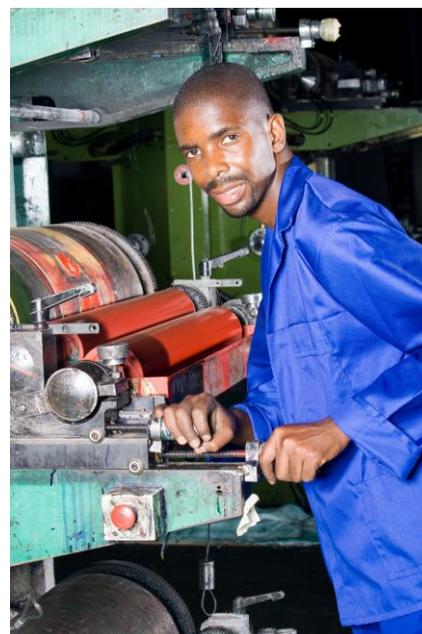
⁷⁹ Shonkoff et al., 2009.

⁸⁰ Center on the Developing Child. (2015). *Executive function and self-regulation*. Retrieved from <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/>

⁸¹ Steinberg, L. (2009). Should the science of adolescent brain development inform public policy? *American Psychologist*, 64, 739–750.

⁸² Center on the Developing Child, 2015.

Helping justice-involved youth and returning citizens attain and retain livable-wage employment and avoid re-arrest is challenging work. Returning citizens face a host of external threats, including legal discrimination from employers and public systems, and internal threats resulting from the trauma of their past. To-date, most empirical research in reentry has left behind a wake of programs that have failed to achieve the outcomes they sought. The ultimate goal of this study has been to identify those programs that have been successful in achieving low recidivism and high employment rates, to simply learn from them, and identify their strategies, document their systems, and understand the key principles that guide their work. Based on existing research, their reflections, and our direct observation, we reiterate the following key recommendations for future funding and support for employment-based reentry services:



Assessment and Individualized Services:

- Increase support for FBCOs that have strong systems and practices in place to assess and individualize services.
- Help FBCOs build capacity to access and use research-validated assessment instruments.
- Help FBCOs build capacity to understand and appropriately address participants' past experiences and trauma.

Pre-Release Services and Justice Collaboration:

- Support opportunities for FBCOs to develop formal relationships with prison facilities, including obtaining assessment data and clear information about the timing and process for release.
- Increase FBCO access to prison facilities to provide employment readiness training and assessments that complement existing facility trainings and ease the transition to work release and ultimately the community.
- Support leniency or relief from work and restitution payment requirements in work release that would allow more FBCOs to offer multiple credentialing opportunities that improve participants' career trajectories.

Career Pathways:

- Invest in additional implementation and impact research focused on the use of career pathways approaches to employment-based reentry services.
- Extend the REO period of performance to provide programs ample time and resources to support higher tier credential attainment and advancement along a career pathway for returning citizens.

Mentoring:

- Support FBCO efforts to learn more about and infuse cognitive behavioral therapy into their mentoring approaches.
- Study whether the re-conceptualization of case management supports may further the REO programs' mentoring goals by assessing whether providing case managers with the necessary training, supervision, and caseload sizes to act as coaches can lead to better program outcomes.

Appendix A: History of the DOL REO Grants

The following table provides an overview of REO grants, detailing the years of execution, number of grants issued, the total amount awarded, the target population, and distinguishing characteristics of each grant cohort.

Figure 12: Overview of the Reentry Employment Opportunities Grant Programs

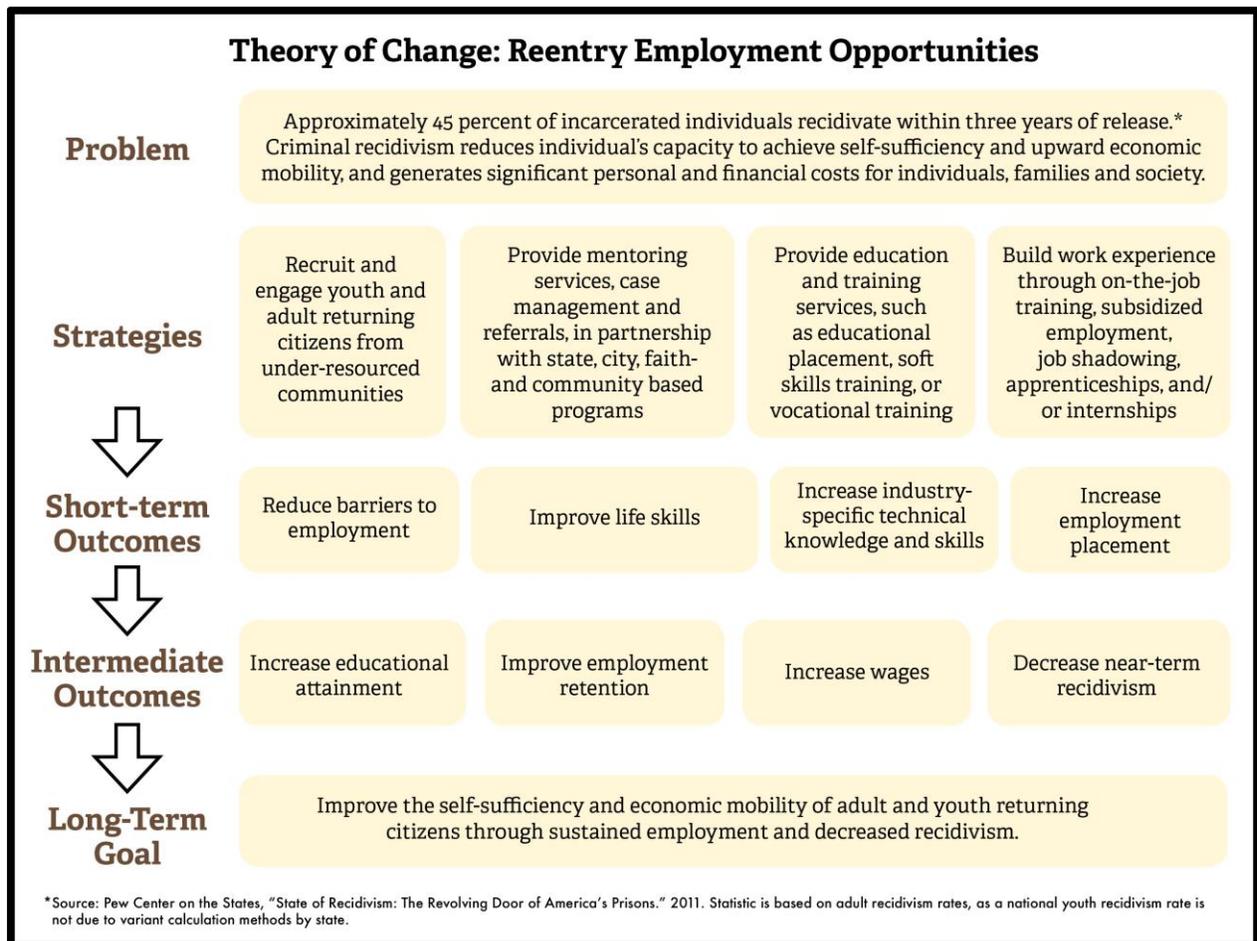
Grant Program Name (Abbreviation)	Years Executed	Number of Grants Awarded	Total Amount Awarded	Target Population & Distinguishing Characteristics
Generation 1 (Gen 1)	2005–2009	30	\$20 million	Adult-focused. Funded organizations providing pre- and post-release services to ex-offenders.
Generation 2 (Gen 2)	2008–2011	22	\$10.5 million	Adult-focused. Collaboration between the DOJ and DOL. The DOJ managed and awarded the funds to state corrections agencies focused on pre-release and reentry services.
Generation 3 (Gen 3)	2008–2011	18	\$5.5 million	
Generation 4 (Gen 4)	2011–2014	10	\$11.7 million	Adult-focused. Funded organizations providing pre- and post-release services to ex-offenders.
Generation 5 (Gen 5)	2012–2014	18	\$20.5 million	Adult-focused. Funded organizations providing pre- and post-release services to ex-offenders.
High Poverty, High Crime 1 (HPHC 1)	2011–2013	2	\$17 million	Youth-focused. Funds intermediary organizations to serve juvenile offenders in high-crime, high-poverty communities. HPHC 5 awardees were actually FF 2 intermediary applicants.
High Poverty, High Crime 2 (HPHC 2)	2012–2014	4	\$19.5 million	
High Poverty, High Crime 3 (HPHC 3)	2012–2015	2	\$17 million	
High Poverty, High Crime 4 (HPHC 4)	2013–2016	4	\$20 million	
High Poverty, High Crime 5 (HPHC 5)	2014–2017	4	\$20 million	
Training & Service Learning (TSL)	2012–2015	21	\$30 million	Youth-focused. Funded organizations serving individuals 18-21 who were involved in the juvenile justice system but were never convicted as adults.
Female Ex-Offenders 1 (FExO 1)	2012–2015	9	\$12 million	Adult and youth-focused. Funded organizations to target youth or adult primarily female ex-offenders, but may serve men as well.
Female Ex-Offenders 2 (FExO 2)	2013–2016	8	\$12 million	Adult and youth-focused. Funds organizations to target youth or adult female ex-offenders, but may serve men as well. Focused on those who have experienced trauma or sexual assault/abuse.

Figure 12: Overview of the Reentry Employment Opportunities Grant Programs (continued)

Grant Program Name (Abbreviation)	Years Executed	Number of Grants Awarded	Total Amount Awarded	Target Population & Distinguishing Characteristics
Training to Work 1 (T2W 1)	2013–2016	16	\$20 million	Adult-focused. Funds organizations providing training and employment services for adults enrolled in state or local work release programs.
Training to Work 2 (T2W 2)	2014–2017	17	\$30 million	
Training to Work 3 (T2W 3)	2015–2018	21	\$27.5 million	
Face Forward 1 (FF 1)	2013–2016	28	\$26 million	Youth-focused. Funds programs collaborating with legal service providers to assist with diversion and expungement, in addition to providing mentoring, workforce development, and education/training services. FF2 and FF3 applicants could apply for intermediary or local grants.
Face Forward 2 (FF 2)	2014–2017	17	\$44 million	
Face Forward 3 (FF 2)	2015–2018	15	\$31.5 million	

Appendix B: Theory of Change and Logic Model

The DOL's ETA shared performance data with ICF on each of the grants awarded from 2005-2015, along with the Solicitation for Grant Awards (SGA) for each grant cohort. ICF reviewed the SGAs associated with each grant cohort, along with performance goals established for each cohort, and used that information to develop a theory of change and logic model meant to encompass the REO portfolio of grant programs. The theory of change articulates a theoretical grounding for the REO programs. The logic model provides more detailed information about the pathways and connections from strategy to the intended results of the program. Although there are significant differences between REO grant programs, we focused on common elements and gave greater weight to DOL's most recent SGAs for Training to Work and Face Forward.



Logic Model: Reentry Employment Opportunities

Inputs: Funding, Organizational Assets, Community Partnerships

Key Activities:

- Engage in identification and recruitment efforts
- Provide case management that assesses assets and needs, addresses barriers to employment, and provides coaching and support
- Provide supportive and workforce services: mentoring, educational attainment support, occupational training, and follow up support
- Provide workforce activities such as subsidized employment, on-the-job training, job shadowing, apprenticeships, internships, etc.
- Develop referral partnerships with complementary service providers and government agencies, as well as employers and Workforce Investment Boards

Key Outputs:

- Number of participants enrolled in program
 - Program participant retention rate
 - Percent received mentoring services
 - Percent entered occupational training
 - Percent gained work experience through subsidized employment, on-the-job training, job shadowing, apprenticeships, internships, etc.
 - Percent received an industry-recognized certificate or degree
 - Number/type of referral, service, and employment partnerships developed
- Youth only:
- Percent with at least one case closed without adjudication
 - Percent to have at least one charge expunged

Short-term Outcomes

- Reduce barriers to employment
- Improve life skills
- Increase industry-specific technical knowledge and skills
- Increase employment placement

Intermediate Outcomes

- Retained employment 3 months after program
 - Increase average earnings 3 months after program
 - Decreased one year post-release recidivism rates
 - Decrease near-term recidivism
- Youth only:
- Attained a high school diploma or equivalency
 - Remained enrolled in school at least one year post-program start

Long-Term Goal

- Decreased dependency on public assistance
- Increased average earnings
- Increased employment retention one year after program
- Decreased three-year post-release recidivism rates

Logic model based on DOL ETA's Training to Work and Face Forward programs. All measures apply to youth and adult programs except where indicated.

Appendix C: Key Performance Metrics

There are no standardized performance measures or benchmarks in the employment reentry field. A literature review conducted by the Congressional Research Service in 2015 noted that most evaluations in the field focus on credentials attainment, post-release employment, and on the provision of supportive services related to housing acquisition, substance abuse, and mental health treatment. Studies conducted by Public/Private Ventures and MDRC also focus on employment retention and average earnings, although the length of time over which employment and earnings were assessed varied (e.g. within 3 months versus within 6 months of program completion).⁸³

The REO grants required grantees to report on a variety of performance metrics that sometimes differed by grant program and cohort. Based on an analysis of reported outcomes across grant cohorts and on the development of the theory of change and logic model, ICF selected key performance metrics for analysis. A list of these key metrics and their definitions are detailed in Figure 13 below. For the adult-focused programs, we focused on employment entrance, employment retention, earnings, and recidivism rates. For youth-focused programs, we also considered placement in higher education or long-term training programs, credential attainment, and high school diploma attainment. Although we noted the number of participants enrolled and the enrollment rate (i.e. the number of participants enrolled compared to the target enrollment number), we did not include these numbers in our analysis as the number of participants served was impacted by funding levels and other variables such as program design. As detailed below, DOL ETA did not use the same performance metrics across all grant programs or even cohorts within those programs, and some definitions of common metrics changed over time. Most notably, the youth-focused High Poverty High Crime (HPHC) grants 1-4 and the Training and Service Learning (TSL) grant used a 'placement rate' that included placement in post-secondary or advanced training as well as employment instead of the 'entered employment rate' used by the other grants.

Figure 13: Defining Key Performance Metrics

Key DOL Performance Metric	Applicable Grant Programs	Definition
Number Enrolled	<i>All REO programs</i>	Number of participants enrolled in the program.
Entered Employment Rate (EER)	<i>All REO programs except for:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HPHC 1-4 ▪ TSL 	Percentage of enrolled participants who were not employed full-time and receiving benefits at the date of enrollment and who are employed in the first quarter after program exit. Participants who were employed in some capacity at enrollment must be placed in a different job with higher wages and/or an increase in benefits to be included in this percentage.
Placement Rate	<i>Used instead of EER for:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HPHC 1-4 ▪ TSL 	The percentage of enrolled participants who have been placed in employment, post-secondary institutions, advanced training, or occupational skills training.
Employment Retention Rate (ERR)	<i>All REO programs except for:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HPHC 1-4 	The percentage of employed participants in the first quarter after program exit who are employed in both the second and third quarters after program exit. ⁸⁴

⁸³ Maguire et al., 2009.

⁸⁴ For HPHC 5 and FF 1-3, Entered Employment is measured during program participation, as opposed to the first quarter after program exit.

Figure 13: Defining Key Performance Metrics (continued)

Key DOL Performance Metric	Applicable Grant Programs	Definition
Earnings	<i>All REO programs except for the youth-focused programs:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HPCP 1-5 ▪ TSL ▪ FF 1-3 	The average earnings for the second and third quarter after program exit for those participants employed in the first, second, and third quarters.
Recidivism Rate	<i>All REO programs</i>	The percentage of participants who were re-arrested for a new crime or re-incarcerated for revocation of the parole or probation order within one year of their release from prison.
Credential Attainment Rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HPHC 1-3⁸⁵ ▪ TSL ▪ FF 1-3 ▪ T2W 1-3⁸⁶ 	The percentage of participants who attain an industry recognized certificate, high school diploma, state high school equivalency credential, or post-secondary education degree.
17 and Younger H.S. Diploma Attainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FF 1-3 ▪ HPHC 1-5⁸⁷ 	The percentage of youth 17 years of age and younger at enrollment who achieve a high school diploma or state high school diploma equivalency. This rate does not include youth who are still active in high school or in a state high school equivalency program.

⁸⁵ HPHC 1-3 only states that the credential attainment rate is the percentage of participants who receive industry-recognized credentials.

⁸⁶ T2W 1-3 specifies that credentials can be attained within three quarters of program exit.

⁸⁷ HPHC 1-5 does not include high school diploma equivalency.

Appendix D: High-Performing REO Grantees

Figure 14 highlights those primarily adult-serving programs who qualify as ‘top performing’ organizations according to the methodology described in the Methodology section. The figure also includes mean performance data across cohorts (captured in parenthesis in the header row) to provide greater context for the relative high performance of the selected grantees. If an organization was a high performer on more than one awarded grant, their performance on each applicable grant is included below. All data is self-report, submitted by grantees to DOL for their final reports.

Figure 14: Top Performing Adult-serving Organizations

Grantee	Grant	Number of Enrolled	Entered Employment Rate (51%)	Employment Retention Rate (51%)	Average Earnings over 6 Months (\$9,625)	Recidivism Rate (15%)
Chicago Christian Industrial League	Gen 3	339	82%	75%	\$8,980	5%
Connection Training Services	Gen 4	443	80%	66%	\$9,808	1%
Directors Council	Gen 1	791	71%	78%	\$11,590	14%
The Dannon Project	Gen 3	340	96%	95%	\$8,631	1%
	Gen 4	410	89%	98%	\$9,892	0%
	Gen 5	426	82%	97%	\$9,805	1%
Empowerment Program	Gen 1	843	76%	84%	\$10,840	13%
Las Vegas Clark County Urban League	FExO	160	89%	53%	\$9,385	2%
Mexican American Alcoholism Program, Inc.	Gen 1	755	61%	80%	\$10,705	18%
OIC of South Florida, Inc.	Gen 1	809	54%	75%	\$10,441	6%
SER - Jobs for Progress of the Texas Gulf Coast, Inc.	Gen 5	349	70%	54%	\$11,745	6%
Span, Inc.	Gen 5	414	77%	66%	\$11,184	4%
Volunteers of America Greater Los Angeles	Gen 3	334	61%	65%	\$10,765	5%

As discussed above, the DOL ETA performance metrics across the youth grants were not consistent across grant programs or cohorts. Further, High Poverty High Crime (HPHC) grantees operated an intermediary model, where DOL ETA provided funding to a national organization that sub-granted funding to other organizations or affiliates through a competitive, DOL-approved process. The following table, Figure 15, highlights top performing youth-serving organizations. Similar to Figure 14, mean performance data is included across cohorts (in parentheses in the header row). All high-performing organizations were TSL grantees; no HPHC grantees qualified as top performing.

Figure 15: Top Performing Youth-serving Organizations

Grant Name	Grant	Number of Enrolled	Placement Rate (53%)	Employment Retention Rate (51%)	Credential Attainment (49%)	Recidivism Rate (4%)
Greater West Town Community Development Project	TSL	101	68%	83%	78%	0%
Human Resource Development Foundation, Inc.	TSL	104	65%	77%	78%	0%
Total Action Against Poverty in the Roanoke Valley	TSL	100	72%	61%	74%	0%

Appendix E: Sample OIC of South Florida Career Pathway

Information Technology Career Pathway

