Reentry Ready:

IMPROVING INCARCERATION'S CONTRIBUTION TO SUCCESSFUL REENTRY

CONVERGENCE

Reentry Ready Stakeholders

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We support this set of solutions as individuals. Our organizations have not formally endorsed this report, and our organizational affiliations are listed for informational purposes. This consensus process resulted in the strongest support for our principles and framework. We urge leaders across sectors to take action on these proposals.

The Report of the Convergence Reentry Ready Project focuses on a critically important reentry challenge: to ensure that all actors and systems that need to collaborate to support reentry efforts have the mandates, resources, and accountability to do so.

This report provides a framework for improving collaboration among actors and systems, with the goal of creating a more integrated and effective support network for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals engaged in the process of reentry.

The Reentry Ready Project stakeholders are a diverse group composed of public and private prison officials, correctional officers, experts in mental and physical health, direct service providers, the faith community, education advocates, researchers, criminal justice experts, and right and left-leaning advocacy groups. Within the group are formerly incarcerated individuals who offered unique perspectives on the needs and concerns of individuals involved in the criminal justice system.

This Report reflects their belief that improved collaboration among supporting actors and systems will enable individuals to achieve a more successful reentry and to transform their lives, thereby reducing the rate of recidivism.

Many actors, inside and outside of the criminal justice system, have a strong interest in ensuring that people who have been incarcerated become law-abiding and productive citizens upon reentering society. Though the overall number of people in prison is at a comparative low point given numbers seen in the last few decades, several states are seeing an increase in the populations of local jails[1] and a Bureau of Justice Statistics study found that 68% of state prisoners released in 2005 were rearrested within 3 years.[2]

The high costs of recidivism include the ever-increasing expense to taxpayers of the criminal justice system; the loss of the public's safety and security in daily life; the disrupted lives and loss of safety and security experienced by victims of crime, their families, and their communities; and the disrupted lives and lost opportunities experienced by incarcerated individuals, their families, and their communities.

Recently, increased attention to the continuing negative effects of incarceration has yielded new ideas for promoting successful reentry. Fortunately, numerous instances of successful reentry efforts are available on which to build. The economic and social benefits of successful reentry can be game-changing, not only for formerly incarcerated individuals and their families, but also for local communities, states, and the entire country.

Reentry as a cross-systems challenge and opportunity

Reentry is a sustained process that begins when an individual is first in contact with the incarceration system, continuing through the period of incarceration and the individual's reintegration into society. This report focuses on how to enable responsible systems and actors to coordinate and collaborate effectively

as they work with individuals during incarceration and after their return to the community. Many incarcerated individuals have complex needs and challenges, ranging from physical and behavioral health to education and employment. **Therefore, coordination and collaboration among the public and private systems that focus on corrections, health care, education and training, employment, housing, social services, and other issues are essential to ensure successful reentry.**

Over the course of 15 months, the Convergence Reentry Ready Project focused on approaches to reentry that remove barriers inhibiting cross-systems collaboration and promote full alignment of actors and integration of systems needed to support successful reentry. The Reentry Ready Project team brought together a diverse group of stakeholders with unique perspectives and often conflicting views about how to ensure successful reentry. Stakeholders discussed and debated current policies and practices, identified barriers to action, developed strategies to bridge divides, and reexamined long-held beliefs about what stakeholders can expect to achieve when helping individuals through the experience of incarceration and reentry. Through a dialogue-to-action process, the participants built trust, identified breakthrough solutions, and formed alliances for action.

Shared principles

To guide this process, the Convergence Reentry Ready Project stakeholders created a set of shared principles. The principles underscore a common purpose: **to accelerate the transition already underway from using incarceration primarily to punish and isolate those who have committed crimes to using incarceration as a means to ensure that incarcerated individuals return to society ready to live a productive life without additional involvement in the criminal justice system.**

The stakeholders agree on the following principles:

- **Humanity and agency** of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals

- **Dignity** for all who have a role in incarceration and reentry

- Concern for **public safety** implications of incarceration and reentry

- **Shared responsibility** for reentry process

- **Systems collaboration and integration**

- **Accountability**

- **Restoration and self-sufficiency** of the incarcerated individual as a primary goal

The stakeholders recommend a theory of change and a set of reentry strategies that reflect these principles.

Theory of change for successful reentry

The Convergence Reentry Ready Project stakeholders recognize that improving coordination and collaboration across the diverse systems needed to support reentry is a major challenge. Based on their own experiences and on evidence from other areas of social policy and practice, the stakeholders believe that major improvements are necessary and possible. The stakeholders' theory of change leading to successful reentry is shown on the next page.

"The solutions/recommendations we generated are innovative and have the potential to be widely adopted by outside groups and organizations. These recommendations will be useful in my state of North Dakota as we look to build on the work that we've done and provide pre-trial services."

LEANN BERTSCH, DIRECTOR, NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS & REHABILITATION

THEORY OF CHANGE

If incarcerated individuals and the systems that supervise and support them use an integrated case management approach to set and achieve individualized reentry goals,

AND

State and local leaders authorize and support such an approach,

AND

Leaders and systems also remove key barriers to reentry success that are embedded in current systems,

THEN

More individuals will succeed in reentry, public safety will improve, and returning individuals, their families and communities will experience social and economic gains.

Strategies for collaboration to meet specific reentry challenges

To translate the theory of change into action, the Reentry Ready Project team focused on several specific areas of challenge and opportunity for individuals during incarceration and after return to the community: **education and employability; family, housing and community connections; physical and behavioral health; cross-cutting strategies.**

In each of these areas, the Reentry Ready Project stakeholders recommend cross-system actions to improve the outcomes for returning individuals, their families, and their communities, while reducing risks to public safety. In addition, the stakeholders see the need for several cross-cutting strategies to create stronger leadership, funding, information, and accountability for cross-system collaboration.

These strategies must also address the stigma associated with incarceration. The "headline" strategies for each of the major areas of cross-system collaboration are on page 9.

The need to remove key barriers to success

In each of the identified areas, state and local leaders need to remove system-specific barriers that make reentry extremely difficult for many returning individuals. Key barriers to reentry include incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals' inadequate access to health insurance and to facilities offering medical treatment and behavioral healthcare; inability to access educational opportunities and appropriate training; inability to obtain occupational licenses; difficulty obtaining job counseling and placement; inadequate access to housing; and difficulty restoring family life and accessing social support networks.

Some of the most important steps to remove these barriers include:

- Ensuring that all reentering individuals have some form of health insurance and have access to health care in the communities to which they return

- Providing access to both basic and higher education for all incarcerated individuals, and ensuring transferability of credits earned during incarceration to institutions where the students can continue their education after reentry

- Facilitating easier, more frequent contact with family members and community organizations during incarceration and including family members in reentry planning

- Providing job placement services for all incarcerated individuals as they approach release

- Removing bans on occupational licenses for individuals with criminal records if the benefit of the employment opportunity vastly outweighs any public safety concern, as is the case for many occupations requiring licenses

- Creating additional transitional housing with supportive services for reentering individuals, using state-local and public-private partnerships to address financing, service, and siting issues

Incentives for change

The landscape of social policy is littered with examples of well-intentioned efforts to change systems that have failed to achieve their goals. In most cases, these efforts failed because they provided insufficient incentives for individual and institutional change. The Reentry Ready Project stakeholders note that **the design of an effort to change a system should include strong incentives to change. Efforts to change reentry systems must provide strong incentives to change both for reentering individuals and for the systems that work with them.**

Incentives for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals

- Positive reinforcement to reentering individuals who effectively use services offered to meet the individual's identified needs

- Reduced sentences or time under supervision for incarcerated individual's participation in programs aimed at meeting the individual's reentry needs

- Opportunity to achieve GED and other credentials during incarceration, thereby positioning the individual for employment and other liberties upon release and during reintegration

- Improved self-efficacy as individuals pursue and meet personal goals

Incentives for incarceration and reentry systems

- Improved outcomes for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals

- Compliance with external mandates for collaboration

- Improved outcomes in performance-based contracting environments

- Increased reinvestment in multiple systems that achieve better outcomes and generate cost savings

- Improved response to crises and negative events

- Increased job satisfaction of criminal justice staff

- Positive media coverage, leading to stronger public and political support for investments in reentry systems and criminal justice staff

- Improved opportunities to attract philanthropic and other private investment capital to fund innovative programs and systems

- Financial and human resource supports for businesses and landlords when they hire or rent to formerly incarcerated individuals

Strategies for Change

Education and employability

+ Create effective programming and cross-system support for education and employability during incarceration

+ Build system support for education, training, and employment post-release

Family, housing and community connections

+ Ensure affordable and accessible housing for reentering individuals

+ Foster community ownership in successful reentry

Physical and behavioral health

+ Improve the scope and quality of provided treatment services

+ Expand treatment capacity and effectiveness

Cross-cutting strategies

+ Support development of high-performing leaders and teams in incarceration and reentry systems

+ Increase financing for reentry collaboration and systems integration

The potential for a national transformation of reentry policy and practice

The Reentry Ready Project stakeholders acknowledge that each jurisdiction is unique, and that responsible actors and systems must address many complexities to encompass a coordinated, collaborative approach to reentry. However, the stakeholders believe that every jurisdiction in this country can achieve major gains by moving in the direction they advocate. They base their belief on strong evidence, not on hope. Anticipated gains to individuals and communities include improved public safety, enhanced quality of life in the communities to which incarcerated individuals are returning, and better life outcomes for formerly incarcerated individuals and their families. Strong public and private leadership will enable actors and systems to help currently and formerly incarcerated individuals achieve a successful reentry and reap its benefits.

Path forward to reentry success

While the strategies presented in this report reflect substantial and broad consensus on potentially transformative approaches to successful reentry, we understand that there will be improvements and variations to these ideas that will occur as jurisdictions grapple with the challenges of implementation. Successful reentry requires the thoughtful and strategic collaboration of multiple overlapping systems, working in concert, to help currently and formerly incarcerated individuals achieve their reentry and life goals.

Reentry Ready Project stakeholders recommend that the strategies in this report be viewed as a suite to be implemented together; they should not be taken apart and offered a la carte. They advise that the ongoing piecemeal approach to supports and services will continue to be inadequate for meeting the myriad needs of currently and formerly incarcerated individuals. They hope that the deep collaboration suggested becomes the new normal for incarceration and reentry systems.

Reentry Ready Project stakeholders remain committed to facilitating the best possible outcomes for the millions of individuals involved in the justice system. We welcome a deep and thoughtful examination of the strategies by leaders and practitioners across multiple systems; and others invested in reentry success such as families and community leaders. We ask that you disseminate this report and these ideas widely, critically review and study them, and consider how you might adapt or adopt the key ideas in the report through expanded collaborations and other implementation efforts as part of your commitment to effect positive change.

"At the National Governors Association, we recognize that governors play a critical role in efforts to implement smarter, fairer and more cost-effective criminal-justice policies. Governors have championed reforms that improve reentry practices and prepare individuals to return to their communities from incarceration. I applaud the Convergence Reentry Ready Project for highlighting strategies that governors and other state, local, and community leaders can utilize for a collaborative system-wide approach to achieve better outcomes for the hundreds of thousands of individuals returning to our communities from incarceration, as well as reduce recidivism and improve public safety for all communities."

JEFFREY S. MCLEOD, DIRECTOR, HOMELAND SECURITY & PUBLIC SAFETY DIVISION, NATIONAL GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION

1. Evans, W. (2018, June 14). Are Prison Populations Decreasing? Depends On Where You Look. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/2018/06/14/619827057/are-prison-populations-decreasing-depends-on-where-you-look

2. Recidivism - National Statistics on Recidivism. (2019, May 21). Retrieved from https://www.nij.gov/topics/corrections/recidivism/Pages/welcome.aspx