

FINAL REPORT



Reentry Ready:

IMPROVING INCARCERATION'S CONTRIBUTION TO SUCCESSFUL REENTRY

CONVERGENCE



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Convergence Center for Policy Resolution is a national non-profit based in Washington, DC that convenes individuals and organizations with divergent views to build trust, identify solutions, and form alliances for action on issues of critical public concern. Reports and recommendations issued under our auspices reflect the views of the individuals and organizations who put the ideas forward. Convergence itself remains neutral and does not endorse or take positions on recommendations of its 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.

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“For anyone who does not see the value in reentry programs, ask yourself, what kind of neighbors do we want returning citizens to be when they return home? Investing in returning citizens makes sense. There is no better fix to the ills we see in society than opportunity.”

BRIAN FERGUSON, DIRECTOR, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA MAYOR'S OFFICE ON RETURNING CITIZEN AFFAIRS

Introduction

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 jails¹ 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 for incarcerated individuals, their families, and their communities.

Recently, increased attention to the continuing negative effects of incarceration has yielded new ideas for how to promote successful reentry. Happily, 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.

Over the course of 15 months, the Convergence Reentry Ready Project stakeholders focused on approaches to reentry that remove barriers inhibiting cross-systems collaboration and promote the full alignment of actors and the integration of systems needed to support successful reentry. The Reentry Ready Project team brought together a diverse group of stakeholders who were often in conflict in their 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.

This report reflects the knowledge and experience of a distinguished and diverse group of national experts and stakeholders involved with reentry. Based on their expertise, this report focuses on a critically important reentry challenge: **ensuring that the full range of actors and systems that need to collaborate to support reentry efforts have the mandates, resources, and accountability to do so.**

Enabling incarcerated individuals to reenter their communities and become productive citizens requires not only their effort and commitment, but also support from many actors and systems—corrections, education, job training and employment, physical and behavioral health, housing, community, and family. Admittedly, many of the communities to which formerly incarcerated individuals return do not have adequate or appropriate resources to meet identified needs. This is especially true of communities of color burdened by decades of disenfranchisement and disinvestment.

Therefore, these actors and systems need to consider local community contexts and the very real racial and ethnic disparities that hinder reentry success. Actors and systems must work in concert to support the individual during the reentry process by meeting their unique reentry needs and reducing their barriers to reentry, complementing and, where necessary, supplementing the resources in the individual's home community.

In the context of the criminal justice system, and in this report, “reentry” is considered a sustained process that begins at the first point of contact with the incarceration system rather than a single event in time. This report focuses specifically on the period of incarceration and reintegration back into society (with or without post-release supervision) and describes a set of services and supports needed to enable an incarcerated individual to return to the community prepared to be a productive community member without additional involvement in the criminal justice system.

Effective reentry requires a joint effort by the incarcerated individual, corrections staff, and representatives of other social and public systems, who must undertake the following activities:

- Assessing the individual's needs and risks, whether physical, behavioral, social or emotional, educational, or work-related
- Setting reentry goals based on assessment, and plans as to how to meet them
- Undertaking necessary and appropriate physical and behavioral health treatment
- Pursuing relevant educational programs, and developing life skills and job skills during incarceration
- In the months before release, building or rebuilding connections to the family and the community the individual plans to return to, and ensuring that the individual has key documents and resources that he or she will need immediately upon reentry, such as a valid identification card, education and skills certificates, a place to live, health insurance, enrollment in additional treatment and/or education and skill-building programs, connections to community-based social services providers, and employers and/or employment agencies
- Ascertaining the physical and mental toll incarceration has had on the individual and adjusting the reentry plan to address the harm endured, as well as accounting for the unequal distribution of negative health effects given race and gender

- Establishing a post-release supervision approach with the primary goal of supporting the released person's successful reentry
- In the months after release, securing housing, employment or other legal sources of income, maintaining ongoing health care, securing any necessary social services, and continuing to build constructive connections to family and/or community
- In the years after release, translating initial reentry successes into stable and productive participation in the community and society

Unfortunately, few jurisdictions in the United States offer cross-system collaboration that consistently and effectively supports the process of reentry and reintegration. Instead, most currently and formerly incarcerated individuals experience fragmented, underfunded, and overtaxed systems that further punish their failures instead of facilitating their successes. Likewise, some reentry initiatives are

ineffective and counterproductive, exacerbating the challenges of reentry instead of enabling success.

This report provides a framework for improving collaboration among actors and integration of 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 believe 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. The report summarizes the content of discussions with a wide range of experts, offering several strategies that can be deployed to increase the number of individuals who successfully return home to lead more productive lives than before their incarceration, avoiding additional involvement with the criminal justice system.

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.

“Where has Convergence been all this time? The Convergence process gave me an opportunity to share what correctional officers really think about our role in reentry. Too often we are left out of conversations about reentry. Everyone assumes that correctional officers are not invested in effective programs and services inside prisons. On the contrary, we want people to get the help they need to live better, more productive lives and not return to prison.”

**STEPHEN WALKER, DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS,
CALIFORNIA CORRECTIONAL PEACE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION**

The Challenge

Approximately 2.3 million people are in custody in the United States' criminal justice system.³ These individuals are in state and federal prisons, juvenile correctional facilities, local jails, and tribal jails. They are also in military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers, and state psychiatric hospitals. Approximately 840,000 additional people are on parole while another 3.6 million are on probation.⁴ These data underscore the harsh reality that the United States incarcerates people at a higher rate than any other country in the world.

Reports and data recently released suggest that some criminal justice reform strategies are working, and overall rates of incarceration and recidivism have declined,^{5,6} which is encouraging. But, approximately one in three Americans has a criminal record,⁷ and one in 55 adults is under some form of community supervision,⁸ which further illustrates that the scope of incarceration and reentry in the United States is complex and far-reaching.

For the large number of individuals subject to confinement in the United States, the period of physical custody is only the beginning of a lifetime of challenges. Once released from prison, formerly incarcerated individuals are met with a host of obstacles to successful reentry.

Though it should be noted that “reentry” and “recidivism” are defined and measured by a variety of methods that produce divergent statistics, a widely used estimate asserts that 630,000 individuals reenter society annually from prison,⁹ another 11 million cycle through jails,¹⁰ and another 4.5 million are under some form of court ordered supervision whose status mimics those that are formerly incarcerated.¹¹ The large number of individuals returning each year represent a daunting challenge to our nation’s social and human services infrastructure.

Individuals who return to society from prison each year face myriad challenges, including potential rejection by friends and family; employers and landlords concerned about their criminal history; and difficulty accessing basic elements of life on the outside, such as securing

valid identification and accessing public services. Stigma, structural racism, and misinformation often place critical support just out of reach, and guidelines issued by public agencies place formerly incarcerated individuals at the bottom of waiting lists for services that are already in short supply.

These concerns extend to the much larger population returning from jails, as well as to individuals who are not incarcerated but are subject to different forms of community supervision. More than 48,000 legal consequences of being convicted of a crime are identified in the [National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction](#) and are likely to inhibit an individual’s successful reintegration.

Planning effectively for reentry success is impossible without recognizing and accounting for the many confounding factors that contribute to individuals becoming involved with the criminal justice system. Among the societal elements that play a part in poor reentry outcomes are poverty, a lack of investment in education, insufficient health resources, mental health and substance abuse disorders, and systemic racism that has led to higher rates of incarceration for ethnic and racial minorities.

In reference to the confluence of inputs that lead to negative outcomes, University of Texas, Austin, sociology professor William R. Kelly describes a “nearly perfect recidivism machine” in which, “the decision to not properly fund public health, schools and social welfare agencies has created problems that by default are managed by the criminal justice system.

Criminal justice reform means much more than merely reforming the criminal justice system. It requires massive changes to and investment in a variety of collateral institutions.”¹² Reentry Ready stakeholders assert firmly that multiple overlapping systems must collaborate to facilitate successful reentry.

Consequences of the high rates of incarceration and the challenges associated with reentry are not limited to those who are directly subject to the system. Society must bear the high fiscal and social costs of the inflated rates of incarceration and recidivism. Though the annual cost of corrections is often cited as \$80 billion,¹³ a 2016 Washington University of St. Louis study asserts that this figure drastically underestimates the actual cost of incarceration. According to that study, incarceration’s aggregate cost is close to \$1 trillion annually, fueled by related social costs that amount to nearly 6 percent of the gross domestic product of the United States.¹⁴

Among these social costs are communities grappling with over-criminalization, poverty, and negative social effects on families. Additionally, unfilled jobs and overlooked talent in the workforce contribute to negative societal outcomes. Notwithstanding differing opinions about the purpose of incarceration, widespread agreement supports the need to reduce criminal justice spending while ensuring public safety. Although our nation is doing important work concerning the high rates of incarceration, we need to improve significantly our response to the needs of reentering individuals. We need to ensure that resources such as evidence-based interventions and adequate funding are available to meet existing and emergent needs.

The lack of public funding for key systems is compounded by the concentration of formerly incarcerated individuals in urban neighborhoods and rural communities to which a disproportionate number return. Many communities and neighborhoods have been hard hit by deindustrialization and the disappearance of middle-class jobs; the shortage of safe, affordable, and habitable housing; and the erosion of broader social networks and family connections. Moreover, inadequate funding of and investment in physical and behavioral treatment capacity in these localities often means that jails

and prisons become default providers of necessary services, such as preventive health services and medication-assisted treatment (MAT).

The challenges of reentry are further inflated for those in a racial, ethnic, or economically marginalized group that has borne the weight of many decades of racial and economic discrimination. For instance, over 35 percent of those in the U.S. prison population are black.¹⁵ Additionally, almost 15 percent of men and 30 percent of women who are booked into jails each year have a mental health condition.¹⁶ In the most disadvantaged neighborhoods and communities, the challenges of integrating formerly incarcerated individuals are overwhelming. Given the varying environments to which people return, a nuanced approach is necessary to ensure effective reentry across diverse populations.

Along with underfunding and the concentration of challenges in disadvantaged neighborhoods and communities, the Reentry Ready Project dialogue revealed several challenges to collaboration and integration of corrections, education, employment, health, and housing systems at the local, state and national levels.

- **Silos:** Incarceration and reentry system agencies have different operational and cultural characteristics that often conflict. Medical care for incarcerated individuals offers an example. Corrections systems operate with entirely separate health providers and funding streams than community-based healthcare systems, making it difficult for returning individuals to reestablish eligibility for benefits and transition to community-based health care. Determining how to transcend the obvious and perceived walls between incarceration and reentry systems and to promote cross-system connections is a challenge. However, well-designed cross-system collaboration improves outcomes for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals wherever the systems intersect.
- **Benefit eligibility:** Public and private funding, and the policies that govern incarceration and reentry systems, include strict rules that hinder cross-system collaboration. For example, rules

that limit eligibility for federal student aid for individuals with certain types of convictions, and the misinterpretation of rules regarding felons' ability to access public housing, hinder the ability of currently and formerly incarcerated individuals to access services and supports that are critical to reentry success. Additionally, individuals are usually not covered by Medicaid while they are incarcerated,¹⁷ and eligibility is often not re-established for individuals prior to release.¹⁸ This discontinuity of benefits leads to discontinuities of care and can affect short- and long-term health status of formerly incarcerated individuals.

- **Accountability:** Stakeholders note that each system is accountable for a different set of outcomes and to different constituencies. The primary metrics for corrections systems focus on safety and security, rather than on successful preparation for reentry. Technical training programs accountable for placing students into jobs are discouraged from accepting “high risk” reentering individuals who face stigma in the job market. The lack of a common set of outcomes and shared accountability makes systems less willing to invest their limited resources in cross-system collaboration. In contrast, developing shared metrics and shared accountability for achieving them can lead to implementation of mutually beneficial actions that improve reentry outcomes.
- **Leadership:** Stakeholders noted that public officials, as well as business and community leaders, often see the challenges of reentry as primarily a problem for corrections and law enforcement agencies, rather than the concern of the full range of state and local public agencies and private partners that could promote success. This relates to the work of leaders at all levels of government. Even when leaders do commit to work together across systems, maintaining momentum and sustaining commitments over time is problematic, given leadership changes, dynamic political pressure, and shifting public will. Election cycles bring changes of leadership in various appointed and elected positions, making it difficult to build the relationships necessary for deep collaboration. Actors and systems

concerned with supporting incarcerated and reentering individuals must work to maintain the momentum of collaboration despite constantly changing leadership and decision-making processes.

Though these challenges are daunting, they are not insurmountable. Ample evidence from around the country demonstrates that aligning reentry goals with resources and accountability of key systems does increase reentry success for formerly incarcerated individuals.¹⁹ Each success is accompanied with public cost savings, reduced public safety risks, stronger families, and more cohesive communities.

The challenges mentioned here are not isolated to urban communities. Rural communities are also challenged by high rates of unemployment, inadequate health care services, and limited social services support. Furthermore, many rural communities are experiencing the growing opioid crisis, which is stressing their already limited resources.

Key Principles

Transforming how corrections and other systems work together to support reentry success was the focus of the Convergence Reentry Ready Project. Stakeholders expressed a deep commitment to advancing a set of actionable strategies that can lead to positive changes within and across multiple systems.

To guide the exploration of strategies to support successful reentry, Reentry Ready Project stakeholders created a set of shared principles. The principles underscore a common purpose: **to accelerate the transition already underway from using jails and prisons primarily to punish and isolate individuals who are incarcerated to using incarceration as a means to ensure that incarcerated individuals return to society prepared to be productive members of their communities.**

Stakeholders agreed that reentry does not require a trade-off between public safety and success for formerly incarcerated individuals. In fact, successful reentry not only leads to a productive life for formerly incarcerated individuals, but also achieves greater public safety and more cost-effective use of public resources.

Stakeholders affirmed that incarceration and reentry do not affect the incarcerated individual only. Incarceration and reentry affects every person in the family and the community of the incarcerated individual. Incarceration and reentry of individuals affects our society as a whole. Therefore, the Reentry Ready Project's principles and values apply to the individuals involved in the system, their families, their communities, and to the wide range of systems that contribute to the success of formerly incarcerated individuals as they reintegrate into society.

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

We must uphold the humanity and agency of all incarcerated individuals. Individuals who have become involved in the criminal justice system should share in the decision-making process

at all stages of reentry, enabling them to take responsibility for their actions and to articulate and achieve their goals.

- **Dignity for all with roles in incarceration and reentry**

Incarceration and reentry systems should value and respect the dignity of incarcerated individuals, criminal justice staff, victims and survivors of crime, as well as families and communities with a stake in the individual's successful reentry.

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

Society has a fundamental interest in ensuring that incarceration systems contribute to successful reentry and reintegration. Successful reentry reduces recidivism, improves public safety, and frees up resources to meet other public needs.

- **Shared responsibility for reentry**

Effective reentry is a shared responsibility of returning individuals, their families and the communities they return to, and the systems that need to work together to support reentry, including criminal justice, education, employment, housing, health and social services, whether administered by public institutions or by community-based nonprofit organizations and faith communities.

- **Systems collaboration and integration**

Since no single agency or system has the entire responsibility of addressing and meeting the complex reentry needs of incarcerated

individuals, public systems, philanthropy, business, the faith community, and other partners need to align with each other officially regarding their reentry goals. These systems should coordinate and integrate their support programs for incarcerated individuals, working together to create approaches and capacities to achieve reentry goals, to support and embrace a shared mission, and to ensure pathways for individuals to accomplish successful reentry into their families, communities, and civic life.

- **Accountability**

Policymakers should establish evidence-based reentry goals for the systems that need to collaborate, and they should allocate the resources necessary to achieve those goals. Policymakers should offer incentives encouraging systems to accomplish the identified reentry goals, as well as holding these systems accountable for meeting them.

- **Restoration and self-sufficiency**

Establishing a sense of community belonging is an important part of reentry and reintegration. Therefore, once an individual has paid his or her debt to society, legal institutions should make every effort to restore the civic rights and privileges of the formerly incarcerated person, including the right to work, vote, parent, and engage in civic life.



Theory of Change

In line with the principles they have articulated and reflecting on their collective experience, the Reentry Ready Project stakeholders have developed a theory of change for improving reentry success. The stakeholders know the success factors for individuals. They know what public and private systems need to do to help individuals succeed. And they know that a coordinated, collaborative approach is more efficient and more effective for service delivery and public safety.

The Reentry Ready Project stakeholders' theory, in brief, is that:



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.

Evidence and practice in a limited number of jurisdictions across the country strongly supports this theory. The Reentry Ready Project stakeholders are calling for the adoption of this theory of change throughout the nation, and its adaptation to every jurisdiction, as a means of accomplishing dramatic advances in reentry policy, practice, and results. A more detailed articulation of the theory follows.

Individual success factors

Individuals who have been incarcerated are more likely to be successful in reentry if they have the following:

- The mindset and motivation to be law abiding and productive citizens
- Health (physical and behavioral) and the ability to maintain it
- Knowledge, skills and credentials that are in demand in the job market
- Stable and affordable housing
- Connections to family and community networks that will offer continuing support for the individual's mindset, motivation, health, housing, education and employment

The need for a cross-system, case management approach

Corrections systems work with currently and formerly incarcerated individuals to help the individual reintegrate into society, but they cannot produce successful outcomes without additional help, and they should not be expected to do so. Health systems, education, job training and employment systems, affordable housing providers, social service systems, and community institutions must also support the individual in the reentry process.

To make cross-system support work, the Reentry Ready Project stakeholders believe that a case management approach is essential. The case management approach, used for integrated

social-service delivery throughout the country, has had success in supporting individuals who share many of the same life challenges that reentering individuals face. This approach is also in use in a relatively small number of state and local jurisdictions around the country, including North Dakota²⁰ and Cook County,²¹ Illinois, to support reentry. The case management approach has shown great promise in jurisdictions that have initiated its use for this purpose, even though the systems assisting reentry still have much work to do.

The use of a number of important mechanisms make the case management approach effective:

- Institutional agreements among corrections, community-based supervision (parole and probation), education, employment, health, housing, and social service agencies at state and local levels, to establish goals, roles, responsibilities and resources for supporting individuals during incarceration and reentry
- Case management teams for incarcerated individuals as a central element of these institutional agreements, to include representatives of all the systems named above, coordinated by corrections during incarceration and by another appropriate agency during reentry
- Initial assessments at the start of incarceration by the case management teams, in collaboration with the incarcerated individual, to determine reentry goals, risks, and needs
- An outcome-focused plan covering the period of incarceration for each individual, to include commitments by and incentives for the individual, as well as commitments by and incentives for participating systems to provide services that the incarcerated individual needs to succeed
- Periodic joint review during the period of incarceration, in which the case management team and the incarcerated individual monitor the progress of the individual and the provision of services, making adjustments to agreements and plans where needed

- Joint identification of essential services and supervision that the individual will need during his or her first 6–12 months after reentry and a review that must occur during the 3–12 months immediately before reentry and lead to:
 - creation of a detailed reentry plan
 - confirmation of services to be provided post-reentry
 - designation of a post-reentry case manager and team (with the assumption that corrections will leave the support team and one or more community-based public and private agencies will join it)
 - additional outreach to the family and community to which the individual will return
 - additional in-reach from the community (family, faith-based or other social services organizations; education and job training; health care; and community supervision agencies, as required)
- Implementation of the reentry plan by the reentering individual and the team, with periodic joint review and adjustment

The need for state and local leadership

In most jurisdictions, establishing this approach will require major shifts in all the systems involved. At the state level, governors, legislative leaders, and agency heads need to agree on the critical importance of cross-system collaboration to increase reentry success and reduce recidivism. These leaders can establish goals for the state, identify roles and responsibilities of state agencies, encourage information sharing across entities and allocate the resources needed for effective case management to provide services and supports to individuals during incarceration and after reentry into the community. Specifically, for corrections systems, a case management approach will usually require new regulations and investments in job reprofiling, retraining, and recruitment.

Local government leaders, public agencies, private and nonprofit service providers, and faith communities need to participate as full partners with their state-level counterparts. This is especially important for local leaders and agencies in the jurisdictions that receive the largest proportion of individuals reentering from state correctional facilities. In addition, local governments should create similar case management approaches for individuals incarcerated in their jails, giving priority in the allocation of case management resources to those with highest risk and need.

The need to remove key barriers to success

A well-designed, adequately resourced case management approach is necessary, but not sufficient for success. State and local leaders also need to remove system-specific barriers that make reentry extremely difficult for many returning individuals. Key barriers are outlined in the above discussion of challenges hindering successful reentry of incarcerated individuals and explained in fuller detail in subsequent sections of this report.

In brief, 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 supporting services for reentering individuals, using state-local and public-private partnerships to address financing, service, and siting issues

A case management approach will be far more successful if these barriers are removed. Conversely, removing these barriers will be far more impactful if paired with a case management approach.

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.

“Structural racism and stigma from a felony conviction puts crucial public support systems out of reach for many returning citizens. Because of the way public agencies operate, anyone convicted of a felony, regardless of their crime or how long they have been out of prison, such individuals are placed at the bottom of waiting lists for services already in short supply.”

DR. KEESHA MIDDLEMASS, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, HOWARD UNIVERSITY

Strategies for Reentry Success

The Reentry Ready Project stakeholders' theory of change recommends the deployment of a specific set of strategies and activities to facilitate successful reentry. These strategies and activities are focused on the following three periods during the reentry process: 1) during incarceration, 2) during preparations for release, and 3) upon release and during reintegration into the community.

The stakeholders acknowledge that other important milestones occur along the path of incarceration and reentry, but they focused their efforts on these three specific points in time to encourage key actors to make incarceration time well spent, not just time served. The strategies shown below are by no means a comprehensive list. Instead, each set of strategies suggests ways to intervene and support incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals to achieve their goals. The stakeholders offer **Strategies in Practice** to demonstrate the possible outcomes when incarceration and reentry systems adopt personalized, comprehensive, and evidence-based strategies.

The strategies presented apply to specific outcomes that the stakeholders assert will lead to more successful reentry: education and employability; housing, family and community connections; and physical and behavioral health. Additional crosscutting strategies relate to opportunities for overall systems improvement.

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 returning residents
- Foster community ownership in successful reentry

Physical and behavioral health

- Improve the scope and quality of treatment services provided
- 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

Education and Employability Strategies

Incarcerated individuals often have not completed secondary education, and many have very limited reading and math skills. Most have less work experience and fewer job-related skills than the general population.²² During incarceration, individuals need education and training that builds on the knowledge and skills they have already attained and provides additional job-related skills enabling them to become viable candidates in the job market in the communities to which they return.

When preparing for reentry, individuals need support in performing job searches and identifying educational opportunities in the community. During reentry, many will need continuing support in performing job searches and in the interviewing and hiring process. These challenges are magnified by racial and class disparities present not only in the criminal justice system but also in the broader economic context and in the specific communities to which the released often return.²³ Those who seek additional education and training need personal and financial support in identifying appropriate education and training programs, enrolling in them, and completing them.

Currently, resources and incentives for cross-system collaboration on education and employability are very limited. As a result of the recession, between 2009 and 2012, budgets for educational expenditures in correctional facilities decreased by an average 6 percent.²⁴ Given the potential for collaboration, this is especially disheartening. Though colleges have been pushing for additional funds from both state and national government sources for correctional education, funding allocation has been irregular.²⁵

Support for job training and placement is also poorly coordinated. While the number of individuals in technical and career programs increased by

a percentage point during the same period that correctional education budgets were shrinking,²⁶ stakeholders assert that many of these training programs teach skills that are not in demand in the job markets to which reentering individuals are returning.

Once in the job market, reentering individuals face multiple barriers: many employers are risk averse or stigmatize formerly incarcerated individuals; state licensing laws prohibit those with criminal records from practicing many licensed professions.²⁷ Many individuals, like most job seekers, could benefit from programs to take advantage of job search tools and build their interviewing skills and confidence. Those who do gain employment in low-wage jobs may struggle to remain motivated as their wages are likely to be inadequate to cover basic living expenses and any child support debt and fines and fees they are required to pay.

Additionally, it is important to note that formerly incarcerated individuals bear more than just the opportunity costs associated with a period of time away from other employment or educational pursuits. Periods of incarceration are detriments to an individual's chance of future opportunities because of resulting resume gaps and because a criminal history is likely to have a negative effect on a potential employer's hiring decisions.

Create effective programming and cross-system support for education and employability during incarceration and build system support for education, training and employment post-release

The challenges to education and employability are also opportunities for greater cross-system collaboration and effective strategies to make a significant difference. Education, employment, and corrections systems can work together during incarceration and during reentry to improve incarcerated individuals' education and skills, and to increase the potential for reentry to lead to sustained, stable employment. Key strategies include the following:

- Staff representing corrections, education and employment systems collaborate with the incarcerated individual to assess knowledge and skills at the start of incarceration and develop a plan for education and training based on that assessment.

Across the country, successful partnerships among correctional institutions, community colleges, and

other education and training organizations, including nonprofits that focus on life skills and motivation and nonprofit and for-profit career and technical education (CTE) providers, assess individual needs and help incarcerated individuals choose appropriate education and training programs. We need to scale or replicate these partnerships for every correctional facility, to provide effective assessments for every incarcerated individual, and to update those assessments periodically. Periodic reassessments can recognize and reward achievement when the individual has advanced, and revisit the individual's goals, motivation, learning capacity, and program choice if he or she has not made progress.

Strategy in Practice: George Mason University Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence has developed [The Risk-Needs-Responsivity \(RNR\) Simulation Tool](#). The tool is designed to assist justice agencies in determining what forms of programming will be most effective in reducing recidivism and improving outcomes for their population. The tool is also designed to guide resource allocation and help criminal justice agencies identify service provision gaps. It is made up of three linkable portals that



provide support for decisions at the individual, program, and system level. Used together, these tools can have a significant impact on recidivism at a system level.

- Corrections, education/training organizations and public and private employers collaborate to provide appropriate programming and work opportunities during incarceration, so that skills and credentials will have value in the education system and job market after release, and money earned during incarceration is sufficient to cushion reentry.

Individual assessment should be the starting point to link incarcerated individuals with programming that is relevant to their educational levels and to the job markets to which they will be returning.

Educational opportunities should be available to those incarcerated from the beginning of their term of incarceration. Some correctional facilities have developed creative and effective partnerships with education and training counterparts, and with local employers, to provide quality training and work opportunities.

Educational engagement while incarcerated is not just instrumentally valuable as it relates to post-release life. It can yield immediate benefits to the person incarcerated as well as their place of incarceration. The incarcerated individual may experience life with more dignity; a correlation has been observed between education opportunities and a reduction in negative behavior.²⁸ In some cases, proactive engagement with correctional facilities by educators and nonprofits has led correctional institutions to create space and programming with education and training partners.

Strategy in Practice: [Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections](#) offers inmates at its Angola prison an opportunity to learn from highly skilled peer mentors. These mentors enhance the training development in automotive and construction training classes to assist unskilled individuals in attaining an industry-based certification (IBC) in their chosen field of training. Certifications through the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) and the Automotive Service Excellence

(ASE) are offered to individuals as they complete the training program to assist the individual in attaining employment after release.

Funding for educational programs is a critical challenge for many corrections systems. To meet the challenge, identifying and using available resources is critical. Federal Pell Grants²⁹ are currently available to some incarcerated individuals involved in the Second Chance Act pilot program.³⁰ Full restoration of Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated individuals across the country would substantially increase the resources available for higher education. For job-related skills, state workforce development boards (WDBs) can dedicate Federal Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding to incarcerated individuals, and corrections institutions can work with employment skills training providers to access those funds. Expanding the availability of WIOA funds for incarcerated individuals should be a target of joint advocacy by corrections and workforce development leaders at both the Federal and state levels.

- Corrections systems work with employers, legislatures, and service providers to ensure that incarcerated individuals earn a *fair wage*, and to minimize debt accrued during incarceration.

Along with work opportunity, it is important to address the issue of pay for work performed during incarceration, as well as the charges and fees that incarcerated individuals often accrue. Payment of a fair wage is an important basis for both accruing savings and building motivation for legal employment. In addition, reducing the charges and fees for services that incarcerated individuals use (for example, telephone call charges) reduces the debt that individuals need to pay off when they return to the community. Lower debt strengthens incarcerated individuals' incentive to work and increases the resources available to pay the costs of housing, food, health care, and transportation upon release.

- During preparation for reentry, community-based education and employment organizations (including CTE and higher education organizations, social services, employment agencies, and employers) provide in-reach and community connections to help incarcerated

individuals identify education and training and employment opportunities.

Opportunities for job searches, interviews, and work placement in the community as part of pre-release preparation can be very valuable to reentering individuals who need to build their skills, prepare resumes, gather references, and gain confidence. For these programs to be available and effective to all qualifying individuals, corrections systems need to partner with state and local labor and workforce organizations (such as local WBDs), employer organizations such as local and state chambers of commerce, and individual employers who can commit to employing a significant number of incarcerated individuals. Communication and coordination among these organizations is important to establish shared priorities and to align programs for reentering individuals. The ultimate goal is for both reentering individuals and employers to benefit from relevant and cost-effective training and job placement strategies.

Given that inclination to hire this community is at its highest when the unemployment rate is low,³¹ WBDs have an opportunity to offer particular help to reentering individuals who hope to take advantage of the current job market. Tracking and documenting the results of job placement for returning individuals also is important, providing evidence for success that can convince employers to continue hiring reentering individuals during times when the job market is not so tight.

“Every person involved in the criminal justice system has value! The Reentry Ready dialogue process was grounded in our collective belief in the dignity, humanity, and agency of system-involved individuals. I was pleasantly surprised to be a part of a process, with folks from both sides of the aisle, where we could agree and act with these principles in mind.”

ASHLEY MCSWAIN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY FAMILY LIFE SERVICES

During reentry, community-based education and employment organizations provide ongoing personal and financial support to reentering individuals, as well as engagement with employers, in collaboration with community supervision where relevant.

Strategy in Practice: [Georgetown Law School's Pivot Program](#) is a non-credit-bearing certificate in business and entrepreneurship created specifically for formerly incarcerated individuals. Designed and delivered by Georgetown faculty, the Pivot Program is a one-year transition and reentry program centered on a blend of academic work and supported employment.

Strategy in Practice: [The Georgia Department of Corrections, CoreCivic, Oconee Fall Line Technical College and Wiregrass Georgia Technical College](#) have partnered to offer vocational training to incarcerated individuals to improve reentry success. Housed in Vocational Training Centers in Coffee Correctional Facility and Wheeler Correctional Facility, the welding and diesel maintenance programs provide individuals with skills in these high-demand fields.

The first months of reentry are critically important for long-term success. The risk of recidivism is higher when reentering individuals do not have a steady job or are not enrolled in an education or training program that is likely to lead to employment.³² A recent National Association of Counties (NACo) survey of 550 local WBDs found that roughly half of the respondents offer some reentry programs. Many of these programs focus on job readiness skills and on job placement. However, only 29 percent have programs that seek to educate employers about hiring reentering individuals.

Strategy in Practice: According to the [National Association of Counties' \(NACo's\) survey](#) completed in 2015, WBDs work with counties to create effective trainings and offer valuable assistance in the effort to yield positive reentry outcomes. Close to half of the WBDs that responded operated reentry programs in their communities and reported marked successes. Among the positive outcomes was a 29 percent reduction in recidivism rates and that 44 percent of the reentry programs run by the WBDs placed individuals in jobs.

Family, Housing, and Community Connection Strategies

When individuals are released from incarceration, many in society hope that their served time has prepared them to contribute to their community. This anticipated mental shift, however, is often undermined by the individual's inability to find safe and affordable housing. The lack of accessible housing is a significant concern for formerly incarcerated individuals. Unfortunately, in most communities and at all levels of government, the current policies constitute an abdication of responsibility for vulnerable returning residents.

Local entities have immense discretion concerning public housing access for reentering individuals and may respond to political pressure and shifting community opinions in making decisions about housing recently released individuals. Given a political climate that can be particularly hostile to the needs of those who are seen to have violated societal trust, communities often have inadequate plans in place for housing those returning from incarceration.

In some cases, policies and perceptions actively exclude the formerly incarcerated. Reentering individuals face an inhospitable housing landscape, including zoning laws that prevent the formerly incarcerated from living in certain areas (sometimes including areas where they have support systems); community members who maintain biased misconceptions about justice-involved individuals; and landlords who discriminate based on the stigma associated with having a criminal record.

Challenges also exist at the federal level. Many returning individuals have no place to live and are de facto homeless on the day of release. However, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD, which regulates the 2,600 public housing

authorities around the country, as well as private developers who receive HUD subsidies)³³ excludes those who have been incarcerated for more than 90 days from the protections afforded to those who qualify as homeless.³⁴ Given the vulnerable state in which certain individuals who exit incarceration may find themselves upon release (including ongoing health issues, lack of familial support, and unemployment) and the failure of the government to recognize them as homeless exacerbates an already challenging set of circumstances.

Support from family and community-based organizations is needed to supplement and sometimes fill gaps in publicly funded services to this population. However, familial relationships are often strained due to absence during incarceration. Sometimes family members are also the victims of the formerly incarcerated individual who is in need of support. Often conditions of release will not permit a formerly incarcerated individual to live with the very person or persons willing and able to support them. Without a strong, reliable, resourced and willing social support system, the odds of successful reentry are severely reduced.



ALLEGHENY COUNTY JAIL
FAMILY ACTIVITY CENTER

Stakeholders affirm that incarceration and reentry systems must not compound the challenges with regulations and procedures that would inhibit the provision of services and supports designed to facilitate successful reentry.

If a definition of success in reentry only contemplates that a person will not re-offend without concerning itself with the supports critical to ensure that lack of criminal behavior, it is incomplete. Safeguarding housing as well as community and familial support for those recently released is mission critical to a successful reentry.

Ensure affordable and accessible housing for returning residents

- **Expanding affordable and accessible housing for returning individuals**

In working to expand housing for those returning from a period of incarceration, it is critically important to ensure that the potential housing is both affordable for those grappling with limited financial resources and accessible given the restrictions often placed on those post-release. By anticipating and planning for these hindrances in the provision of housing, support systems can help the formerly incarcerated avoid additional hurdles as they seek an effective reentry.

Strategy in Practice: [Seattle/King County Section 8 Voucher Program](#):

In unincorporated King County, Seattle, or Bellevue in Washington State, landlords are prohibited from denying housing to an individual based on his or her status as a recipient of Section 8 funds. This helps to ensure the availability of local housing options, not only for the persons released from incarceration, but also for their families.

Strategy in Practice: [King County Housing Authority \(KCHA\)](#):

Also located in King County, Washington, the KCHA provides as many as 46 single parents facing homelessness upon release with Section 8 vouchers each year. The allocated vouchers afford the recently released parents and their children the ability to inhabit multifamily apartments run by the YMCA in rural areas.

- **Partnering among local, state, and federal public organizations and private or faith-based organizations to increase the availability of housing**

The provision of available housing for the formerly incarcerated requires the active involvement of a variety of entities relevant to our national housing context. Developing partnerships across sectors—including public, private, and faith-based organizations—would serve as a valuable step in acknowledging the shared responsibility of a

variety of societal groups and in recognizing their potential to have a positive influence on housing accessibility.

Strategy in Practice: [Delancey Street](#) (San Francisco): For over 40 years the Delancey Street Foundation has been providing services and housing opportunities for individuals who would have been unable to find other opportunities for housing. Residents develop skills and work together to achieve shared goals. With offshoots like a café, a digital printing shop, a moving service, and a landscaping outfit, residents can be trained in valuable services that can serve them beyond their time of residency.

Strategy in Practice: [Fortune Society](#) (Castle Program): Each year the Fortune Society provides a comprehensive suite of services to over 7,000 individuals with incarceration histories. Based in New York, this organization specializes in culturally competent services and is dedicated to hiring people with a variety of experiences. Almost half of the organization's staff has a record of incarceration and serve as role models for those at the beginning of their time post-release.

- **Expanding transitional and permanent support housing models**

In the effort to ensure that those recently released have a safe environment to inhabit, more than one model offers a potentially effective plan for expansion of available housing. A number of models for the expansion of housing opportunities, both permanent and transitional, offer viable types of housing that would serve the population of individuals recently released from incarceration.

Strategy in Practice: The [Frequent User Service Enhancement \(FUSE\)](#) supportive housing program in New York City offers housing to homeless individuals who frequently stayed either in shelters or were placed in jail. In a 2013 study commissioned by the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, it was shown that after a year over 90 percent of FUSE

participants were still housed compared to 28 percent of individuals who were not in FUSE.

Strategy in Practice: [Housing First \(Milwaukee\)](#) in Wisconsin, focuses on providing housing to the homeless population in Milwaukee, not just those categorized as chronically homeless or without preconditions. Since its inception in 2015, it has not only drastically reduced the number of those considered homeless in the county but also saved the state of Wisconsin a considerable amount of money: \$2.1 million in Medicaid per year, \$600,000 in cuts to the legal system, and \$715,000 in cuts to mental healthcare.

Foster community ownership in successful Reentry

- **Reducing barriers to family reunification through visitation and close to home incarceration**

One of the strongest predictors of the likelihood of a successful reentry for someone is the strength of that person's ties with a support system. Being connected to other people, particularly those within one's family, can provide perspective and feelings of belonging that are invaluable in a person's growth and sense of purpose. Ensuring that those recently released are allowed to spend time with their families is important in the effort to prevent a person from engaging in behavior that might result in recidivism.

Strategy in Practice: [Incarcerated with child programs](#) are available in correctional facilities of eight states in the United States, including Illinois. Known as "prison nursery programs," these programs allow mothers with newborns to keep their children with them behind bars. Though the studies on these programs are limited, at least one study showed that the recidivism rate for mothers allowed to continue caring for their children while incarcerated was drastically reduced compared to those without the same opportunity.³⁵

- **Restoring family life through counseling, therapy, and trauma management**

The effects of incarceration are not confined to the individual who has served time. Often, a person's family has had to navigate associated trauma related to their family member's offense and subsequent time away. It is also not unusual for a recently released person's family to have negative feelings toward the individual exiting incarceration. Providing opportunities for activities that aid in family restoration may be helpful in easing the path to reentry not just into society, but into family life as well.

- **Peer support and mentoring**

While being supported by the broader community is important to the effective reentry of those released from incarceration, having support and guidance by peers who have successfully

navigated the challenging time immediately post-release can be invaluable to an individual's success. By providing returning individuals with an example of someone who's been able to reenter successfully, those recently released are provided with a model against recidivism.

Strategy in Practice: [Arches \(New York City\)](#) is a powerful mentoring program that focuses on young adults, ages 16–24, who have become involved in the correctional system. In an effort to prevent the recurrence of similar activity, the program uses a group mentoring model to target behavior and beliefs that have led to an individual's probation status. The culture of responsibility, accountability, and support has proven effective, with multiple organizations across the city providing the program.



Physical and Behavioral Health Strategies

Multiple data sources confirm that currently and formerly incarcerated individuals have significant physical and behavioral health needs.³⁶ Individuals may begin incarceration with undiagnosed or untreated conditions such as depression, addiction, and other chronic diseases like hypertension and hepatitis that negatively affect their health and well-being.³⁷

Incarceration rarely improves any preexisting condition; instead, incarceration is more likely to exacerbate the conditions and often creates new ones.³⁸ To improve the quality of treatment services provided and expand treatment capacity during and after incarceration, correctional health care providers working closely with behavioral health, social services and education providers need to first effectively assess the health needs of criminal justice system involved individuals and make that data accessible to practitioners across systems.

Reentry Ready project stakeholders assert firmly that incarceration and reentry systems should conduct comprehensive, evidence-based, gender-specific, trauma-informed assessment processes at first point of contact. Notwithstanding the need for additional research to improve the quality and effectiveness of assessment tools currently available, the stakeholders believe that assessment is an important first step towards improving the quality of services provided.

Making the assessment data available across systems, using electronic health and case management records, is tantamount to bridging the gaps in services that result when one system does not have the mandate or capacity to conduct assessments; even when the data could dramatically improve outcomes. Stakeholders acknowledged that additional research and investment is needed to

resolve barriers to accessing assessment data and sharing data across systems. Barriers to accessing assessment data include inadequate quality of the tools and too few staff trained to administer assessments properly, while antiquated technology and privacy concerns hinder data sharing.

The stakeholders recommend additional opportunities to improve treatment quality and expand capacity as noted below.

Improve the scope and quality of treatment services provided

- **Increase use of evidence-based interventions and clinical care services.** Reentry Ready project stakeholders pointed out that currently the decision about the type and amount of care provided is often made by staff who do not have access to the data or clinical training needed to accurately assess which services are most appropriate. Stakeholders encouraged the development of strong partnerships between corrections and medical professionals to ensure security experts are not making the decisions about clinical care services without the benefit of consultation and support from medical professionals.

Strategy in Practice: The Edgecombe Specialized Chemical Dependence Services program in New York City provides intensive services to people on parole housed at [Edgecombe Residential Treatment Facility](#) for a period of 10–45 days, preparing them for a return to their communities, and engagement in community-based addiction treatment. The facility houses 110 residents who have voluntarily entered treatment. The facility can serve approximately 1,200 individuals annually.

Edgecombe is staffed by a combination of Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) correctional officers, DOCCS rehabilitation counselors; and treatment staff of Odyssey House, the certified provider of the Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS). Individuals at Edgecombe are awaiting a determination by DOCCS regarding their possible reincarceration. The services are designed to provide intensive treatment to residents with the aim of returning them to their communities where they can continue addiction treatment. All residents are expected to have a diagnosed substance abuse disorder requiring intervention and treatment. Edgecombe effectively treats residents in a stabilization program and upon completion, they are referred to continuing care services consistent with an established treatment plan.

Strategy in Practice: The New York City jail system was a leader in and is still one of the largest jail systems to offer methadone and buprenorphine to patients with opiate use disorder.³⁹ Recently, The New York City correctional health service has worked with the [New York State Department of Corrections \(DOC\)](#) on a pilot to allow parolees held at one facility under State DOC custody to also receive methadone. This pilot is the first step in bringing MAT to the larger number of prisoners in New York State custody and New York State pilot with parolees on methadone.

- **Provide technical assistance to correctional leaders regarding evidence-based programs.** Leaders of correctional systems have shared the need for support regarding how to select appropriate evidence-based programs for implementation. Often, they do not have assessment data, and when they do, many do not have staff qualified to make an informed decision about how to match the needs with the programs available to them. Some report that program decisions are most likely made with cost as the primary consideration, not applicability to the needs of their correctional population.
- **Improve training for correctional agency staffs to help them learn how to administer assessments and conduct evidence-based interventions.** Correctional staff and licensed clinical social workers need the skills to administer assessments to provide critical information needed to determine which programs and services individuals require to achieve reentry readiness goals. These staffs should be skilled in providing a range of treatment modalities, including, but not limited to, medication assisted therapies, cognitive behavioral skills training and cognitive behavioral therapy.
- **Create a single formulary for medications.** Ensuring continuity of care, including medication management, is critical to treatment of both physical and behavioral health conditions. When individuals are remanded to or released from custody, medical staff are loathe to interrupt the continuity of care because of the largely technical issue of not being able to prescribe the drugs that work best for the individual. In each state, the Medical Directors for the Medicaid agency and the state department of corrections can resolve this issue by creating a formulary that is utilized by both state agencies. In addition to improving continuity of care, state departments of corrections can realize some cost-benefit through multiagency purchasing agreements.

Strategy in Practice: [The Maine Corrections Pharmacy Focus Group](#) encouraged adoption of a single formulary saying that “...a standard formulary would facilitate movement of an inmate with medication needs from facility to facility.”⁴⁰ Single formularies not only save costs but may also improve inmate health outcomes.

Strategy in Practice: The [Minnesota Multistate Contracting Alliance for Pharmacy](#) offers state agencies that provide medical care the ability to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies as part of a national cooperative. Any state can join the cooperative to receive more favorable, volume discounted rates. Participating states have saved on average approximately 25 percent off the cost of brand-name drugs and 64 percent off generic drugs.⁴¹

Expand treatment capacity and effectiveness

- **Increase the number of skilled practitioners serving incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals.** The number of trained and licensed forensic psychiatrists and psychologists is inadequate to meet the needs of this population. Similarly, although parts of the country have successfully used peer support programs, the number of trained peer support specialists is inadequate to fill the needs of this population. Incarceration and reentry systems need to form agreements with state public health providers and with private providers to bring additional qualified health professionals into prisons and jails to work with the incarcerated population.

Strategy in Practice: The [United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps](#) plays a vital role in providing medical care to the underserved nationwide. Loan repayment is a compelling incentive for individuals to provide care. A similar program could be implemented by the Department of Justice to place psychiatrists, psychologists, behavioral health specialists, and health educators in correctional facilities and other programs serving criminal justice system involved individuals. This type of program can increase both the quantity and quality of services provided to this underserved population.

- **Improve coordination of physical and behavioral health care services to criminal justice system involved individuals.** Correctional health care service providers and community-based service providers should collaborate and share assessment data, clinical care plans, and medical records to ensure continuity of care. One of the critical tools for enabling better coordination of care is the electronic medical record (EMR). By integrating physical and behavioral health delivery in one EMR, correctional health services can improve continuity of care for patients behind bars across areas of the health service and incarcerations, as well as when making collateral information requests for outside information and critically, responding to requests from court-based alternatives to incarceration and supportive housing placement.

Strategy in Practice: In the [NYC jail system](#), hundreds of alternatives to incarceration are facilitated every year by jail-based reentry staff who leverage the EMR to quickly access vital aspects of care, including tuberculosis (TB) tests needed for inpatient programs and psychosocial assessments to help colleagues find more human and clinically appropriate settings for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals.⁴²

- **Provide adequate and appropriate physical space for programming.** Correctional facilities nationwide have insufficient space available to conduct all manner of programs,⁴³ such as small group classes or parenting classes with children present, or that the space they do have is inappropriate to the purpose. The lack of adequate space for programming also means that correctional facilities must prioritize who has access to programs and, consequently, people with convictions are more likely than those without a violent offense to be eligible to participate. Excluding any group of participants from programs is counterproductive, especially if his or her assessment has indicated the need for a specific program.

- **Strategy in Practice:** [The Allegheny County Jail's \(ACJ's\) Family Activity Center \(Pennsylvania\)](#) began with funding from two foundations and money from the county jail.⁴⁴ This center enabled the jail program staff to create a family playroom filled with toys, games. ACJ also provides relationship, parenting, and child development courses to incarcerated parents to help strengthen the bonds between themselves, their children, and the caregivers. The individuals that participate in these classes can earn monthly contact visits and free phone calls with their children. The ACJ is trying to improve the health and well-being of children whose parents are incarcerated by reducing the repeated separations, the emotional upset and deterioration of family support that are a consequence of their parents' incarceration.

“Counties across the country have embraced cross-system collaboration as a central tenet of transformational local initiatives, and we commend this report for its emphasis on coordination between local agencies and between state and local governments. As administrators of various local functions, from criminal justice systems to social service agencies and public health departments, counties can attest that siloed approaches to reentry will likely prove inefficient from a fiscal standpoint and ineffective in helping formerly incarcerated individuals reintegrate into their communities. The blueprint provided in this report for a cross-system approach to reentry can help local officials transcend siloes and formulate effective approaches to addressing this pressing and multi-faceted local issue.”

HADI SEDIGH, MANAGING DIRECTOR, NACO COUNTIES FUTURES LAB, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

Cross-Cutting Strategies

Reforming incarceration and reentry systems will require bold, informed, and steady leadership across multiple systems and the creative use of new and existing resources.

Leading local, state and national incarceration and reentry systems is difficult, and made even more challenging by funding constraints, often conflicting regulations, lack of a common language across systems, different and sometimes conflicting outcome measures, few natural opportunities to collaborate, and leadership and staff transitions that sometimes make it difficult to sustain partnerships.

Likewise, leaders need to be able to work across multiple incarceration and reentry systems, including building cross-systems data capacity. Jurisdictional and agency turf issues and real and perceived silos pose practical and cultural challenges to collaboration. Courageous leadership is needed to embrace deep(er) collaborations and to seek support from their peers and thought leaders to lead their systems through the challenges inherent in any large-scale change process.

Moreover, identifying new financial capital will remain a persistent challenge as state and local governments struggle to meet existing needs. Leading the human and other social capital resources necessary to facilitate successful reentry will challenge incarceration and reentry system leaders in new ways as they seek to steward these resources while the needs and expectations of their systems continue to increase.

Furthermore, reducing stigma around justice-system involved individuals and persons who work with them is essential to creating supportive environments during and after incarceration. In addition to supporting the development of positive attitudes regarding those involved in the system, Reentry Ready Project stakeholders propose the following strategies to help them meet the leadership and financing challenges ahead.

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

- **Change attitudes, culture and perceptions of systems leaders, humanize the affected population and show that the model can succeed.** For elected officials to feel safe prioritizing reentry and engaging strategies that are collaborative across systems, attitudes concerning the value proposition of working to optimize outcomes for returning residents needs to be emphasized. Leaders must be able to see the potential benefits of shifting their focus to and approach regarding reducing recidivism rates.

Strategy in Practice: [Council on State Government's Face-to-Face Initiative](#) challenges all elected officials to participate in a public activity through which they can interact with formerly or currently incarcerated people, corrections officers, victims of crime, and others who have firsthand experience with the criminal justice system.

- **Emphasize the managerial elements of change.** While elected officials might be primarily concerned with big picture aspects of the system, such as cost-saving measures and moral leadership, those tasked with carrying out the functional and bureaucratic aspects of the system must contend with less heady material. We anticipate that senior level officials in criminal justice related agencies will be concerned with the metrics for measuring success and the threshold percentage of alignment required for success. It is necessary to change the metrics/accountability standards that people are measured against to change behavior.

- **Establish the moral case against the present system.** Is any person beyond redemption? Is any life dispensable? Unfortunately, the American justice system operates as if the answer to both questions is “yes,” and not just in rare circumstances. Lives are destroyed or tossed away with shocking regularity by the American criminal justice system; and this happens disproportionately in communities of color.⁴⁵ This pattern is not only costly and worthy of little positive value. The casual and haphazard at best, malicious and purposeful at worst, deprivation of freedom and subsequent refusal to support effective reentry for returning residents is inherently unjust. Communities are expressing a desire for change at the ballot box⁴⁶ and stoking that momentum by highlighting the nation’s moral imperatives is a valuable use of our collective energy.

Strategy in Practice: The [VERA Institute’s Reimagining Prison Project](#) offers a harsh rebuke of incarceration as we know it today. By calling for an acknowledgement of the nation’s brutal history of dehumanization and racial oppression and how it has shaped what we do today in our justice system, the Vera Institute demands reform. Their groundbreaking webumentary offers vivid images of the past and offers hope for the future of incarceration grounded in an acknowledgement of the humanity of all incarcerated individuals. Other thought leaders in criminal justice such as Bryan Stevenson, Ava Duvernay, and Michelle Alexander echo Vera’s call for a reevaluation of incarceration and cite growing public will and political capital that can be brought to bear by formerly incarcerated individuals, their families and communities.

Strategy in Practice: The [State of Connecticut](#) is investing in several efforts to reimagine incarceration for young men aged 18–25 by teaching them life skills, providing mentoring and other social support to help the young men develop into successful adults and community members.

Increase financing for reentry collaboration and systems integration

- **Change sentencing and supervision decisions to ensure that only individuals who pose significant public safety risks are incarcerated; reduce the number of incarcerated individuals; and commit to reinvest some of the savings in reentry systems collaboration and integration.** In the last three decades, the cost to states for incarceration in the United States has increased almost five-fold, escalating from \$12 billion in 1988 to \$58 billion in 2016.⁴⁷ Through the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) model, data drives the reduction of spending on corrections and the subsequent expenditure of saved funds on proven strategies to protect communities.⁴⁸

Strategy in Practice: Since 2010, thirty-five states⁴⁹ that have used the JRI model have saved over \$1.1 billion while investing in treatment and supervision in communities.⁵⁰ In Oregon, the prison population grew by almost 50% between 2002 and 2012, with an increase of almost 5,000 individuals incarcerated. Governor Kitzhaber worked to expand the state’s Commission on Public Safety and in 2013 the state’s legislature passed a bill that aims to reform the state’s approach to criminal justice called the Justice Reinvestment Act. Employing principles established in the JRI model, Oregon has seen positive results, including projected savings to the state of over \$250 million.⁵¹

- **Create integrated case management systems with lead agencies, quality standards for activities and results, and performance-based payments (whether capitated or fee-for-service) to drive reentry success.** It is legally stipulated that a person is entitled to adequate medical care while incarcerated.⁵² Incarceration is often used as a more expensive and less humane alternative to care for those with behavioral health challenges.^{53, 54} An integrated case management system that consolidates financing for a criminal justice system involved person has the potential to increase the efficiency of funding utilization as well as improve the results of care provided.

Strategy in Practice: In Ohio, [CareSource](#), a healthcare company that provides public health care programs, has partnered with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services in the state to facilitate the effective operation of the Community Transition Program (CTP). The program is an effort to aid in continued treatment for those recently released from incarceration with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (ODRC). By managing services for those returning individuals enrolled in CTP, CareSource serves a critical role in case management focused on successful reentry.

- **Overcome the persistent “wrong pockets” problem⁵⁵ for people involved in the criminal justice system.** The “wrong pockets” problem describes a scenario where a local or state agency, other than the department of corrections and rehabilitation, is asked to provide funding to support programs and services for individuals during incarceration. For example, local and state education agencies funding to expand educational services inside correctional facilities while not receiving the “credit” for any of the improved outcomes for individuals during incarceration. Enabling states and localities more autonomy and incentivizing their collaboration may begin to solve some of this challenge.
- **Ensure that individuals have: a) financial resources from earnings during incarceration (at fair wages); b) the eligibility documents they will need to access reentry resources (health care, job training, etc.); and c) financial literacy.** A serious hindrance to effective reentry concerns the poverty of funds and associated resources that returning residents often face upon completion of a sentence of incarceration. Without necessary resources it becomes more likely that an individual will become involved with the criminal justice system again. By addressing this issue with the safeguarding of an incarcerated person’s financial and resource stability, through ensuring that her or his Medicaid benefits are automatically reinstated upon release, for example, negative consequences may be limited.

“Gaining common understanding among stakeholders on what needs to be done to improve the continuum of services and interventions for the incarcerated who are nearing or recently released, as well as understanding what CAN be done has been incredibly valuable. While the proposed interventions are good ideas, most are impossible without significant restructuring and adequate resources. This report offers a guide that local practitioners, like those in my home state of Louisiana, can follow and achieve positive results.”

RHETT COVINGTON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, LOUISIANA
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY & CORRECTIONS

Cross-Systems Metrics for Reentry Success

Education and Employability

Creating Effective Programming and Cross-System Support for Education and Employability During Incarceration

- State corrections, education/training and employment agencies have shared goals and joint accountability for service provision during incarceration, implemented via coordinated budgets and reporting.
- Number and type of programs linked to population need/interests.
- Number and percentage enrolled (by sub-population).
- Program completion rates.
- Percentage effectively implementing pre-release job readiness assessment and matching.

Building System Support for Education, Training and Employment Post-Release

- Number who obtain jobs within first 6 months of release.
- Decreased probation and parole revocation rates (risk adjusted).
- Percent completing courses or certificate/degree programs post-release.

1

Family, Housing and Community Connections

Ensuring Affordable and Accessible Housing for Returning residents

- Local public housing authorities and housing systems identify available subsidized housing for returning residents on an annual or quarterly basis.
- Increased use of proportionate transition that also addresses the risks and needs of each returning citizen
- Reduced regulation and barriers for citing transitional housing (measurable in changes to statutes and regulations).

Fostering Community Ownership in Successful Reentry

- Local Reentry Coordinating Council is formed; meets regularly depending on size of community.
- Increase in community involvement behind the walls of correctional facilities and upon release.

2

Cross-Cutting Strategies for Change

Supporting the Development of High-Performing Leaders and Teams in Incarceration and Reentry Systems

- Increased number of advocates working to improve incarceration and reentry systems.
- Improvements in operations and outcomes that result from more efficient and effective use of resources within and across systems.
- Increased use of cross-system data collected to evaluate collaboration and demonstrate success.
- Increased number of correctional entities that are accredited for reentry.

Increasing Financing for Reentry Collaboration and Systems Integration

- Increased number of states participating in Justice Reinvestment Initiatives.
- Increased number of state and local jurisdictions implementing innovative cross-system funding strategies.

3

Physical and Behavioral Health

Improving Quality of Treatment Services Provided

- Length of time between utilization of high-end/high-cost/acute services.
- Increased use of existing data to inform decision making re: programs treatment needs of clients.
- Metrics on disparate treatments and outcomes based on race/ethnicity as well as gender.

Expanding Treatment Capacity and Effectiveness

- Integrate correctional and public health systems to facilitate continuity of care for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals.

Key Actors in Reentry Success

To implement fully the strategies referenced above, actors across multiple systems must communicate and collaborate effectively.

As previously highlighted, improving reentry prospects requires a rethinking of the responsibility for positive outcomes and focusing on cross-system collaboration. The primary actors are state and local government leaders; however, families, faith-based organizations, media organizations, businesses, and advocacy organizations each have a role in building supportive environments where formerly incarcerated individuals can thrive. While the goal is to produce an environment in which all related systems—not just corrections—work in tandem to improve reintegration, this ideal is only possible when individual systems take ownership over outcomes.

Given the necessity of cross-system collaboration to improve recidivism rates, Reentry Ready project stakeholders note several critical actors whose engagement would be indispensable in achieving optimal outcomes. They are a diverse body, not only in purpose but in function as well. These actors are relevant across Reentry Ready's project stakeholders suggested strategies and, when operating in mutually productive ways, have the potential to produce significant and positive results. One example involves healthcare workers and corrections workers collaborating to provide effective and compassionate care; another involves educators and data collectors collaborating to identify gaps in preparation with the goal of improving post-release outcomes. What follows is a listing of key actors and a visual representation of the same:

Advocacy & Public Policy—State and local government leaders, think tanks and advocacy organizations, victim's rights advocates

Behavioral Health—Mental health and substance abuse advocates, practitioners, researchers, and consumers

Corrections—Inmates, corrections officers, wardens, sheriffs, other staff, researchers, and regulators, community-based detention and other community-based correction services

Courts / Civil and Human Rights—Law enforcement (police and sheriffs), judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys (including public defenders), civil and human rights organizations

Education/Work—Prison education programs, workforce training

Faith-Based—Evangelical organizations, service providers, advocacy efforts, prison ministries

Health and Social Services—Medicaid, correctional healthcare, housing services, employment services, family reunification services, reentry programs, case management

Research and Data—Researchers, academic centers, public agencies

Special Populations—Women, disabled, elderly (55+), juveniles, veterans, LGBTQIA

Key actors must focus on both a breadth and depth of inputs. To cultivate the appropriate level of breadth to engage with strategies in a maximally constructive way, key actors must work to gain an understanding of needs across entities and a working knowledge of the functions of other systems. This breadth of knowledge allows those in certain organizations and roles the ability to partner and collaborate with those outside of their own silos. For depth, those engaged in cross-system collaboration must be deeply aware of challenges in their own systems.

This is important so that the plans for moving forward will be reflective of that awareness and not doomed to fail at the outset due to unrealistic commitments. This knowledge will also allow those involved to help other

organizations and officers troubleshoot. Both breadth and depth are vital as those in relevant systems often face growing expectations as needs expand without a matching expansion of resources. Additionally, these systems are usually accompanied by a beleaguered work force routinely robbed of any real sense of autonomy. These challenges require an agility rooted in preparation, understanding and empathy.

Motivation mobilizes actors to behave in a way that promotes the implementation of the aforementioned strategies. Mechanisms for incentivizing actors present a wide array of challenges and exist at varying levels of effectiveness. All identified by Reentry Ready project stakeholders are valuable potential tools in the effort to reduce recidivism.



Incentives for Change

The key actors involved in successful reentry respond to various incentives to act, often dictated by the systems in which they work. Some of the incentives to act are compatible across systems, such as compliance with governmental regulations.

However, in other cases, systems offer incentives that are incompatible with one another. For example, in the corrections system, ensuring safety and security within the facility is sometimes incompatible with the education or health care system's need to convene groups of incarcerated individuals in program and classroom settings. Likewise, system incentives are often incompatible with incentives for individuals involved in the criminal justice system. For example, a prosecutor may be incentivized to secure long sentences and to require those convicted to serve the maximum amount of time possible. However, reductions in the amount of time individuals serve is a compelling incentive for them to participate in programs offered inside correctional facilities.

Reconciling conflicting individual and systems incentives is a critical challenge that begins with an acknowledgement that multiple incentives across many systems are likely needed to facilitate action with all the key actors. The Reentry Ready project stakeholders identified individuals and systems designed to address the cultural, operational, and other system-performance outcomes—related to the reentry success strategies they developed. While these incentives are not all inclusive—meaning they do not address all the possible incentives that may motivate all systems actors—the stakeholders believe these incentives would lay an important foundation and catalyze action among some key reentry actors.

Incentives for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals

Too often currently and formerly incarcerated individuals are not afforded agency when consequential decisions are being made about

their lives. As noted in one of the Reentry Ready project principles, active and authentic participation in the decisions that affect their lives is critical to the reentry success of formerly incarcerated individuals. Additional incentives that key actors and systems can offer adhere to this principle. These include:

- Positive reinforcement to an incarcerated individual who effectively uses services offered to meet his or her identified needs
- Reduced sentences or time under supervision for an 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

Multiple overlapping systems have an investment in and responsibility for reentry outcomes. The incentives to motivate system actors and processes often overlap; however, systems have a number of specific incentives for collaboration:

- Improved outcomes for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals. Stakeholders affirmed that incarceration and reentry systems too often contribute to poor outcomes by not

providing quality programming, in enough quantity to achieve better outcomes. Stakeholders agreed that all systems and actors have an interest in improving outcomes.

- Compliance with external mandates for collaboration. Incarceration and reentry systems that operate in receivership or some other sanction-based external supervision are more sensitive to efforts to improve system operations and outcomes.
- Improved outcomes in performance-based contracting environments. When funding and other support for systems are contingent upon meeting performance benchmarks, systems and actors are highly motivated to implement effective programs. Additionally, by implementing effective strategies, systems are more likely to be in compliance with accreditation requirements.
- Increased reinvestment into multiple systems. When systems can achieve better outcomes and generate cost savings, a powerful incentive is the ability to reinvest those savings back into the system.
- Improved response to crises and negative events. All systems actors are highly motivated to avoid or improve responses to dangerous and harmful events inside correctional facilities. Avoiding negative incidents and ensuring public safety is also an incentive when an individual returns to the community. Crisis situations and negative events can be used to study and address any vulnerabilities in system responses.
- Increased job satisfaction of criminal justice staff. Stakeholders assert that criminal justice staff report increases in job satisfaction when they are a part of programs and services that improve outcomes for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals. Correctional officers are especially sensitive to this incentive as it can help to reduce the stress and anxiety of always being in an enforcement role. Tying improved outcomes for justice involved individuals to pay increases or promotions for criminal justice staff have also been shown to be powerful incentives for change.
- Positive media coverage. More favorable media coverage and improved public perception of the system can help to build public will and political support for investments in reentry systems and criminal justice staff. Strategies in Practice that improve public perception of criminal justice system and the staffs are also related to increased job satisfaction among criminal justice staff.
- Improved opportunities to attract philanthropic and other private investment capital to fund innovative programs and systems. When systems are performing well and achieving better outcomes, they are more likely to be able to secure additional support from public and private funding sources.
- While not a system per se, the business community and private investors (for example, landlords) can benefit from financial incentives, such as tax credits, when they hire or rent to formerly incarcerated individuals.

Path Forward to Reentry Success

The Convergence Reentry Ready Project intent was to explore how to transform incarceration and reentry systems, with the goal of maximizing successful social and economic reintegration of currently and formerly incarcerated individuals into society. With facilitation from Convergence, the Reentry Ready stakeholders developed a set of strategies designed to break through the barriers hindering incarceration and reentry systems from providing the transformative supports and services individuals need to successfully reenter society.

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 urge that the strategies recommended in this report be viewed as a suite to be implemented together; they should not be taken apart and offered a la carte. They emphasize 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 of 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.

Additionally, Reentry Ready Project stakeholders were clear that in order to see the proposed strategies gain wide appeal and be effective in their utilization, pilot tests must be implemented in a few jurisdictions around the country to provide proof of concept. Pilot tests would not only allow for the demonstration of the successful outcomes that stakeholders anticipate with the prescribed interventions, they would also permit a focused evaluation of the application of the strategies at multiple points along the reentry timeline.

The lessons that would arise from a monitored and facilitated implementation of the approach outlined here in specific jurisdictions would yield untold benefits to national effective reentry as the strategies are increasingly employed. Our hope is that those with the resources to do so aid in the development of such pilots and partner with those involved in the Reentry Ready Project.

Finally, we strongly encourage philanthropies to assemble the intellectual and financial resources to help system reformers successfully make the transition to this new paradigm. And then capture the learnings and measure the impacts so that others can follow their lead and serve and support even more currently and formerly incarcerated individuals. We all have a role to support the millions of individuals and families affected by incarceration and reentry. Consider this report a pathway to new action for both thinkers and doers to contribute to improving outcomes for incarcerated individuals and for our society as a whole.

“The Convergence Reentry Ready dialogue offered stimulating discussion and surfaced many good ideas for each subset of issues--education, employment, housing, family, health, leadership, and financing. I’m pleased with how it all came together, and hope others take these ideas and implement them in their agencies.”

MARC LEVIN, VICE PRESIDENT, CRIMINAL JUSTICE, TEXAS PUBLIC POLICY FOUNDATION AND RIGHT ON CRIME

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