



The Reentry of Formerly Incarcerated Persons: Key Accomplishments, Challenges, and Future Directions

**A Report on the National Reentry Symposium:
Promising Practices and Future Directions**

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Introduction

In July 2015, President Barack Obama became the first sitting president to visit a federal correctional institution. Just two months later, Pope Francis met with men and women incarcerated in Philadelphia's largest correctional facility. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that these events occurred at a time when the U.S. has captured the world's attention as the leader in per capita incarceration rates. Current estimates suggest that 2.2 million adult men and women occupy cells in America's prisons and jails—a striking 910 adults for every 100,000 U.S. residents, or 1 out of every 110 (Glaze & Kaeble, 2014).

It stands to reason that an incarceration rate of this magnitude translates into high numbers of people reentering our nation's communities every day. In 2014, more than 636,000 people were released from state and federal institutions (Carson, 2015)—approximately 1,750 per day—while another 11.4 million are reported to cycle through our local jails each year (Federal Interagency Reentry Council, 2015). Some return to families, jobs, and welcoming communities but most do not, which may explain—at least in part—why release from confinement and the justice system can be a temporary condition for many. National studies indicate that 67.8% of state prisoners are rearrested within three years of their release, and 76.6% are arrested within five years of their release (Durose, Cooper, & Snyder, 2014). Of those rearrested, nearly half—44.9%—are reincarcerated (Durose et al., 2014).

These high rates of rearrest and reincarceration translate to more victims, escalating correctional and justice system costs, and a cycle of challenges for those who enter the justice system and struggle to stay out. It is no wonder that “reentry” is of paramount concern nationally.

The National Reentry Symposium

“Reentry” is the term used to describe the processes and interventions that equip incarcerated individuals to return home and stay home. Recognizing the importance of effective reentry practices at the federal, state, and local levels, in September 2015, the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP), and the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) co-sponsored the *National Reentry Symposium: Promising Practices and Future Directions*. The event was the first of its kind in terms of its composition. Leaders and professionals from the federal correctional system worked in partnership with administrators and representatives from state corrections agencies and large urban jails. In total, over 150 persons representing 31 BOP facilities and 41 states shared information and ideas about the unique challenges of the incarcerated and those seeking to ensure their successful return to the community. Throughout the two-day session, federal and state representatives from each of the BOP’s six national regions met as teams to discuss methods to enhance federal and state collaborative efforts within their regions.¹ The culmination of the Symposium was the development of regionally based reentry action plans designed to reduce the likelihood of recidivism through improved coordination and collaboration and the delivery of enhanced evidence-based programs and services. Key strategies that emerged from these discussions are included in the final section of this paper.

Diagram 1: U.S. Bureau of Prisons Regional Map



¹ Diagram 1 is a regional map of the U.S. Bureau of Prisons and represents the jurisdictions that comprised each region’s teamwork sessions. Source: <https://cryptome.org/2013-info/02/bop-maps/bop-maps.htm>

Key Accomplishments in Reentry

Over the last decade, concentrated efforts to advance reentry have been made by government and private agencies alike. Attention to this matter by the leadership of the U.S. federal government, in particular the Department of Justice, has resulted in important principles that guide the work of policymakers and practitioners across the nation. Dramatic changes have been witnessed with regard to federal and state policy; funding for positions, programs and services; and other resources designed to support a permanent return of formerly incarcerated individuals to the community. Although a review of the full expanse of these efforts was beyond the scope of the Symposium, and in turn this paper, a number of important accomplishments and emerging challenges in reentry were highlighted during the event.

Coordinating Efforts

Given the complexity of reentry—its many dimensions and, in turn, the variety of agencies and efforts it touches—the establishment of a single body with the goal of coordinating federal reentry efforts and advancing effective reentry policies throughout the country has been crucial. In 2011, Attorney General Eric Holder established the Federal Interagency Reentry Council. Comprised of 20 federal agencies, this first-of-its-kind entity has a mission to:

- make communities safer by reducing recidivism and victimization,
- assist those who return from prison and jail in becoming productive citizens, and
- save taxpayer dollars by lowering the direct and collateral costs of incarceration (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015a).

In particular, the Reentry Council works to remove federal barriers that make it challenging for returning citizens to access healthcare services, obtain education and employment, find stable housing, support their families, and contribute to their communities.

Raising Awareness

Successful reentry requires local, state, and federal agencies, as well as the public, to understand the issues inherent in reentry and the needs of returning citizens. Examples of these efforts abound. For instance, the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, participates in coalitions, task forces, and reentry councils to develop reentry strategies related to education, employment, tribal issues, health access, child support, children of incarcerated parents, and other areas. Other branches of the government and their partner organizations also seek to raise awareness of reentry concerns. For example, the American Bar Association developed the National Inventory of the Collateral Consequences of Conviction to increase the awareness of judges, defense

counsel, prosecutors, legislators, policymakers, researchers, and other justice system stakeholders about sanctions and restrictions that affect a released individual's employment and business opportunities, access to government programs and benefits, and ability to participate in family and civic life. The Inventory lists approximately 46,000 collateral consequences, including ineligibility for government contracts, exclusion from management and operation of regulated businesses, and restrictions on family relationships and living arrangements, such as child custody, fostering, and adoption. Armed with an awareness of collateral consequences, stakeholders can make more informed decisions to improve public safety and assist reentering individuals (Berson, 2012). In addition, the Attorney General's Office has reinforced the importance of reviewing collateral consequences, as well as other topics related to reentry such as the formation of the Federal Interagency Reentry Council, in focused letters to state Attorneys General on these topics.

Strategic Reentry Processes

Recognizing that reentry is a process that begins at or before the first day of confinement, correctional systems throughout the country have established systematically planned efforts and sequenced programs, services, and interventions that strive to effectively prepare individuals for their return home. Model approaches such as NIC's *Transition from Prison to Community (TPC)* and *Transition from Jail to Community (TJC)* initiatives have provided important roadmaps and tools for this work.

Designed in a phased approach, these systems use risk/needs (and other) assessment tools to identify the specific risk factors that contribute to an individual's criminal behavior, and develop case plans that sequence interventions and services to effectively address those risk factors

Facilitating Cross-Jurisdictional Measurement

Corrections agencies across the country have different standards to measure their success and different methods to measure those standards. As a result, it is difficult to assess performance or compare results in a consistent way. To address this concern, the Performance Measures Committee of the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA) has developed the Performance-Based Measures System (PBMS). PBMS defines uniform standards in ten key areas (Public Safety, Institutional Safety, Substance Abuse Programs, Mental Health Services, Academic Education, Health Care, Justice, Recidivism, Fiscal, and Personnel); delineates performance measures for each standard and key indicators for each measure; institutes counting rules for each indicator; stores the measures on a web database; and allows participants to monitor their own performance and share and compare their measures with other agencies. Currently, over 900 state and federal correctional facilities are represented in the database.

prior to release. In some cases, this means re-missioning prison facilities so that programs and services better match the risks and needs of the populations they hold, expanding the availability of programs and services across custody levels, and ensuring that they are evidence-based and delivered with fidelity. During the transition phase, meaningful connections are established between professionals working with incarcerated individuals and those who will support or provide programs and services after release; preparations for suitable employment and housing are made; and family reunification along with other supportive activities may occur. Prior to release, provisions for medications, medical insurance, identification, transportation, etc., are made to ensure that the transition home is seamless.

An Overview of the BOP's Reentry Services

Each individual has specific reentry needs that must be addressed to prepare him/her for successful reentry. Within the BOP, the process of identifying these needs begins on the first day of incarceration. Using data contained in the Pre-Sentence Investigation Report and other current documents, the Designation and Sentence Computation Center identifies the facility that can best address the person's needs. Upon arrival at their designated institution, incarcerated individuals meet with staff from a variety of disciplines—education, health services, psychology services, and case management—to assess their risks and needs, and to identify programs to address them.

Following placement, inmates can participate in a vast array of programs, including Drug Abuse Programs, Sex Offender Treatment Programs, Mental Health Treatment Programs, Religious Services Programs, ESL and Literacy Programs, Occupational Education Programs, Parenting Programs, and Federal Prison Industries. The BOP has also compiled the Inmate Model Programs Catalog—an inventory of programs recommended for implementation in institutions. These programs cover areas such as anger management, parenting skills, personal finance, and physical and mental health, and they address specific populations, such as justice-involved women or individuals with mental health issues. In addition, the BOP has created the Community Resource Database, designed to provide returning citizens with a list of services and community partners to support their reentry efforts in areas such as education and employment, medical and mental health, substance abuse treatment, veterans' affairs, clothing/household goods/food, and faith-based needs.

To further support reentry efforts and facilitate global understanding of the policies that affect reentering citizens, the Federal Interagency Reentry Council has published a series of fact sheets called Reentry MythBusters. The Reentry MythBusters address issues such as employment, housing, juveniles, education, access to federal benefits, voting rights, parental rights, child support, federal tax obligations and benefits, drivers' licenses, and social security cards.

Education, Employment, and Vocational Programming for Incarcerated Individuals

Regardless of the efforts to plan for a seamless transition, reentering individuals face enormous challenges establishing prosocial lifestyles. Among these many challenges is the ability to find and maintain employment due to a lack of job-search experience, education, vocational skills, and/or work history, as well as employers' reluctance to hire those who have been involved in the justice system. Correctional industries, educational opportunities, employment readiness programs, federal incentives for employers, and employment retention programs are having a positive impact on reentering individuals' ability to find and maintain employment. Among other efforts, the National Institute of Corrections has developed the Employment Retention Inventory to help employment specialists working in the field of corrections identify and address risk factors related to recidivism that also contribute to job loss.

In terms of policy, best practices, and guidance, the federal government has implemented many initiatives aimed at reducing employment barriers for reentering individuals, including the following:

- On April 25, 2012, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) released a report, *Enforcement Guidance on the Consideration of Arrest and Conviction Records in Employment Decisions Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*, with new guidance on the use of arrest and conviction records in employment decisions. Specifically, it provides guidance on how to consider the nature of the job, the nature and seriousness of the offense, and the length of time since the offense occurred when writing hiring policies and making hiring decisions (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015b).
- On May 25, 2012, the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration and Civil Rights Center issued a Training and Employment Guidance Letter to the public workforce about complying with nondiscrimination policies, including those with respect to individuals who have criminal records. The Department of Labor's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs issued a similar directive to federal contractors and subcontractors on January 29, 2013.

- In June 2015, the U.S. Small Business Administration published a rule extending the federal Microloan Program to small businesses owned by someone currently on probation or parole.
- In November 2015, President Obama called on Congress to pass legislation to “ban the box” for federal hiring and for hiring by federal contractors and directed the Office of Personnel Management to delay inquiries into criminal history until later in the hiring process rather than inquiring on job applications (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2015).

Current Challenges

Despite the many accomplishments of the recent past, challenges remain regarding the effective implementation of strategic reentry processes. While some of these pertain to the body of knowledge referred to as “implementation science”—a field of research that demonstrates that if good ideas are not matched with deliberately planned and well-executed strategic plans, most efforts fall far short of their goals—others relate to the unique needs and circumstances of some of the populations served by the nation’s correctional facilities. The topics described below were among those discussed during the Symposium.

Individuals Who Experience Health and Mental Health Challenges

Prison and jail inmates with physical and mental health concerns typically experience poorer outcomes upon reentry with respect to employment, recidivism, and a host of other factors. Identification of those factors that can prevent these individuals from successfully reintegrating and the development of strategies to ameliorate these concerns is therefore of paramount concern. Important among these is supporting Medicaid applications prior to release and developing mental health care plans for those with serious mental illness (i.e., schizophrenia/psychotic disorders, major depression, bipolar disorder, and organic brain syndrome). Promising strategies include helping individuals understand their diagnosis and manage their symptoms and medication needs, teaching coping skills, and providing peer mentoring and systems of rewards and incentives.

Aging and End of Life Justice-Involved Individuals

It is estimated that adults over the age of 50 comprise 18.6% of the state and federal prison population (Carson, 2015). The number of state and federal prisoners age 55 and older increased by 234% between 1994 and 2013 (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2014). This population faces unique challenges both within the correctional setting (e.g., accelerated aging, chronic illness) and after release. In order to respond to their unique

needs, factors such as accessibility and mobility, housing, dementia and other health and mental health concerns, security and safety, and the difficulty of readjusting to the community after extended periods of confinement must be considered. As well, there is a growing awareness in the nation's correctional facilities of end of life concerns, including release and medical release, the nuances of advanced directives and living wills, and guardianship.

Justice-Involved Women

More than 1.25 million adult women are under correctional supervision in the United States (Glaze & Kaeble, 2014). Between 2000 and 2010, the number of women incarcerated in federal and state correctional facilities increased by 21% (Glaze & Kaeble, 2014), and since 2010, the female jail population has been the fastest growing correctional population, increasing by an average of 3.4% annually (Glaze & Kaeble, 2014). Women typically have different pathways into the justice system, pose a lower risk than their male counterparts, and have distinct risks and needs. Using a gender-responsive approach can lead to improved outcomes for justice-involved women reentering the community. This includes using assessment tools designed to determine areas of need that contribute to women's risk (e.g., mental health history, child abuse, adult victimization, relationship dysfunction, housing safety), developing programs and services that reflect key challenges women face (e.g., transportation needs, financial needs, parenting responsibilities and childcare, employment search and employment, management of relationships, access to support and benefits, substance abuse and mental health), and using an approach to supervision that emphasizes positive relationships, is trauma-informed, and builds on women's strengths.²

LGBTI Individuals

An estimated 8% of state and federal prison inmates and 7% of local jail inmates identify their sexuality as something other than heterosexual (Beck, Berzofsky, Caspar, & Krebs, 2013). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals experience an array of challenges in addition to those faced by other justice-involved individuals, including discrimination and an increased likelihood of sexual assault. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual inmates are at the most risk of being sexually victimized in confinement. Among non-heterosexual prison inmates, 12.2% reported being sexually victimized by another inmate and 5.4% reported being sexually victimized by staff, compared to 1.2% and 2.1%, respectively, for heterosexual prison inmates (Beck et al., 2013). Among non-

² For further information, see the National Resource Center for Justice-Involved Women (<http://cjinvolvedwomen.org>) and the National Institute of Corrections (<http://nicic.gov/informationcenter>).

heterosexual jail inmates, rates for inmate-on-inmate sexual victimization and staff sexual misconduct were 8.5% and 4.3%, respectively, compared to 1.2% and 1.7%, respectively, for heterosexual jail inmates (Beck et al., 2013). Adopting intake procedures that identify safety concerns (i.e., physical and sexual assault) of LGBTI individuals; developing sound classification systems to ensure that housing, bed, program, and education and work assignments keep LGBTI individuals physically and emotionally safe; using language and terminology that is respectful of LGBTI individuals (including paying attention to names and pronouns); ensuring that LGBTI individuals receive medical and mental health care and treatment that meets their unique needs; and developing policies that respect LGBTI individuals' privacy (e.g., with respect to use of facilities, search procedures, undressing) are key to the successful management and reentry of LGBTI individuals (Smith, Loomis, Yarussi, Marksamer, 2013).

Reentering Veterans

Approximately 180,000 veterans are incarcerated in federal, state, and local correctional facilities (Bronson, Carson, Noonan, & Berzofsky, 2015). Veterans represent 8.8% of the U.S. adult resident population; they represent a similar 8.4% of the prison population and 6.7% of the jail population (Bronson et al., 2015). These rates have steadily declined over the past three decades. Among those confined, about half (48% for prison, 55% for jail) had previously been informed by a mental health professional that they had a mental disorder (Bronson et al., 2015). Promising practices to support veterans in their transition back to the community include establishing units in prisons or jails designed to house veterans together in order to deliver services effectively, prepare for reentry, and reconnect with pride from military service, and, prior to and after their release, connecting veterans to services that address their unique mental health, physical health, substance abuse, housing, employment, and education challenges.

Incarcerated Individuals Who Have Been Convicted of Sex Offenses

Of the roughly 1.3 million individuals incarcerated in state prisons, approximately 166,600 are imprisoned for a sex offense conviction (Carson, 2014), and approximately 8% of federal inmates are imprisoned for a sex offense conviction (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2015). Research shows that individuals convicted of sexual offenses vary in many ways, including basic demographics, the nature and extent of their sexual behavior, development and functioning, intervention needs, and risk to reoffend. As a result, case management strategies should be tailored to address individual needs and risk factors in order to increase the likelihood of successful reentry and to increase community safety. This includes using empirically based risk/needs assessment tools to support the development of individual treatment plans in both institutional and post-

release community settings; utilizing cognitive behavioral interventions to decrease the risks of those who sexually offend; developing release and integration processes (e.g., holding staffings prior to release to identify behavioral health referrals, housing needs, appropriate employment placements, etc.); and planning for community registration and notification requirements.³

Future Directions

Regional Strategic Action Plans

Prior to the Symposium, representatives from federal and state agencies had never before met on this scale to identify common goals or challenges, or to identify the ways in which they could strengthen their work through collaboration. A primary purpose of the Reentry Symposium was to establish these cross-jurisdictional partnerships to more effectively support the return of individuals to their communities. As a result of their work together, the regional teams each developed a strategic action plan to continue their dialogue and put into motion their collaborative work. A host of strategies were identified. Included among them were the following:

- Develop vision and mission statements and guiding principles for regional reentry efforts.
- Create a regional community corrections network.
- Establish an electronic messaging and information exchange network.
- Identify the core competencies and skills needed by staff to implement evidence-based practices and research-supported reentry strategies.
- Share recruitment strategies, job descriptions, and performance evaluations for key staff positions.

Voices of the Experienced

Three formerly incarcerated individuals reflected on their experiences in prison and on some of the factors related to in-prison and post-release success. Among the most significant was the impact of correctional staff who demonstrated belief in their ability to live a life different from the one that brought them to the prison gate. In addition, they spoke with eloquence about the need for meaningful opportunities within prison to develop the skills and tools that will support success on the outside, such as the opportunity to participate in relevant vocational and educational programming and to receive incentives for participation in skill-building programs and services. Most notably, they spoke with candor about the profound importance of the institutional environment; those that promote respect and treat all people with dignity impact in immeasurable ways the incarcerated individual's attitude toward, and degree of hope for and motivation to pursue, a prosocial lifestyle.

³ Visit the Center for Sex Offender Management at www.csom.org for additional information on this topic.

- Jointly develop staff training curricula.
- Conduct joint training for staff in reentry specialist positions.
- Work towards standardization of assessment tools throughout the region.
- Coordinate facilitated access to healthcare benefits and services.
- Identify strengths and gaps in all aspects of reentry work; collaboratively build on assets and fill in gaps.
- Pool experts on special populations within the region; convene joint educational webinars on topics of mutual interest.
- Develop a regional community education campaign.

A National Reentry Network

One of the key goals of the Reentry Symposium was to form a Reentry Network, comprised of representatives from local, state, and federal corrections, to promote the sharing of ideas and resources, and to advance reentry practices and services nationwide. The Reentry Network is in a formative stage, but plans are ongoing to hold a yearly meeting to afford attendees the opportunity to continue their collaboration and resource sharing.

Key Reentry Resources

Increasing Public Safety Through Successful Offender Reentry: Evidence-Based and Emerging Practices in Corrections. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Assistance; Center for Effective Public Policy, 2007. This handbook offers a framework for an effective offender reentry strategy based on leadership and organizational change, a rational planning process, collaboration, and effective offender management practices. http://www.cepp.com/documents/CEPP%20SVORI_final.pdf

Life After Lockup: Improving Reentry from Jail to the Community. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Assistance; Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center, 2008. This report synthesizes lessons learned by the Jail Reentry Roundtable Initiative, which was established to address the challenges faced by jail administrators in assisting inmates—most of whom are in jail for less than one month—with issues such as substance abuse, job and housing instability, and mental and physical health concerns in order to improve reentry outcomes. http://www.urban.org/research/publication/life-after-lockup-improving-reentry-jail-community/view/full_report

National Reentry Resource Center. Under support from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the National Reentry Resource Center (NRCC), a project of the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, provides education, training, and technical assistance to those working on prisoner reentry. Its initiatives include the What Works in Reentry Clearinghouse, an online resource of research on reentry practices; an online library with more than 1,000 publications and other materials about proven and promising reentry interventions; and online state and local reentry directories to help returning individuals identify service providers in their communities. <https://csgjusticecenter.org/nrcc>

Prisoner Reentry Services: What Worked for SVORI Evaluation Participants? Final Report. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice; RTI International, 2012. Results from the second evaluation of the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI), a large multi-site collection of state and local programs, are described. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/238214.pdf>

Reentry MythBusters. Lexington, KY: The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center. Reentry MythBusters are a series of fact sheets—on topic areas such as employment, housing, health, education, juveniles and reentry, and access to federal benefits—intended to clarify federal policies that affect reentering individuals and their families. <https://csgjusticecenter.org/nrcc/projects/mythbusters/>

Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council: Charting the Safe and Successful Return of Prisoners to the Community. Washington, DC: U.S. Departments of Justice, Labor and Health and Human Services; Council of State Governments, 2005. This report presents 35 policy statements organized in three areas—planning reentry initiatives, reviewing

the reentry process, and ensuring effective health and social service systems—that should form the basis of reentry initiatives. <https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Report-of-the-Reentry-Council.pdf>

The Transition from Jail to Community (TJC) Initiative. Washington, DC: National Institute of Corrections; Center for Effective Public Policy, 2008. This document describes the NIC-sponsored Transition from Jail to Community (TJC) initiative, a national project designed to encourage collaboration between jail and community leaders in order to improve individuals' reentry outcomes and enhance public safety. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/023331.pdf>

TPC Case Management Handbook: An Integrated Case Management Approach. Washington, DC: National Institute of Corrections; Center for Effective Public Policy, 2010. This resource is designed for teams of correctional and non-correctional staff at policy, management, and line staff levels who are responsible for implementing improvements in supervision and case management in order to reduce recidivism and enhance community safety through successful reentry. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/024393.pdf>

TPC Reentry Handbook: Implementing the NIC Transition from Prison to the Community Model. Washington, DC: National Institute of Corrections; Center for Effective Public Policy, 2008. This handbook describes the NIC-sponsored Transition from Prison to the Community (TPC) model including its key features, a roadmap for implementing the TPC model, and the TPC performance measurement framework. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/022669.pdf>

Transition from Jail to Community Online Learning Toolkit. Washington, DC: National Institute of Corrections; Urban Institute, 2010. This online learning resource provides those implementing the Transition from Jail to Community initiative, as well as those interested in reentry, with practical information to implement the model. <http://tjctoolkit.urban.org/index.html>

For additional reentry resources and information, see NIC's Offender Reentry Annotated Bibliography at http://info.nicic.gov/nicrp/?q=system/files/026286_0.pdf.

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The White House, Office of the Press Secretary (2015, November 2). Fact sheet: President Obama announces new actions to promote rehabilitation and reintegration for the formerly incarcerated [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/02/fact-sheet-president-obama-announces-new-actions-promote-rehabilitation>