LEAP Issue Brief Compendium: Delivering workforce services to justice-involved job seekers before and after release

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INTRODUCTION

This compendium presents a summary of findings from the planning and implementation phases of the Linking to Employment Activities Pre-Release (LEAP) pilots, and includes 10 issue briefs organized around key themes that emerged during the evaluation of LEAP (see Box 1 for more information).

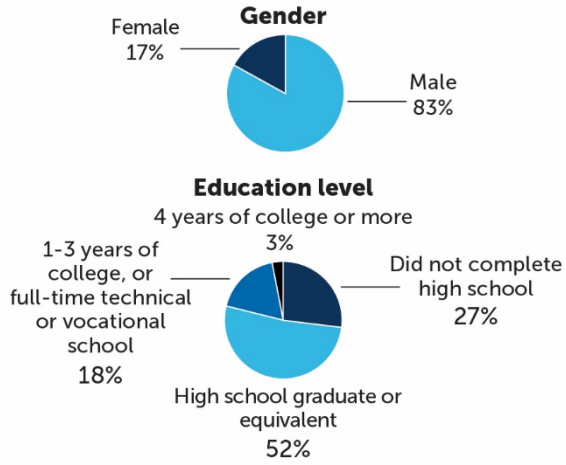
The LEAP pilots are intended to break the cycle of recidivism by linking participants to the workforce system early—while still in jail—and then immediately upon reentry into the community. To accomplish this goal, corrections and workforce development agencies partnered to establish American Job Centers (AJCs) within jails and then connect participants to community-based AJC's upon release. This innovative venture required overcoming many challenges inherent to providing services within a jail environment, including the short average length of jail stays, often unpredictable timing of release, and other logistical challenges such as limited internet access. These pilots provided workforce and corrections partners with the opportunity to troubleshoot these challenges, identify promising practices, and develop strategies to sustain the jail-based AJC services beyond the life of the DOL grant.

This compendium draws on information gathered from the first round of 20 LEAP grantees. Five of the briefs describe grantees' experiences during the early planning period while five describe experiences during implementation. The briefs will provide useful information to DOL as well as the broader **workforce development and corrections** communities in their efforts to help **justice-involved job seekers** transition to life outside jail.

Box 1. About the LEAP grants

- In 2015, the Department of Labor awarded LEAP grants to 20 local workforce investment boards in 13 states to pilot the creation of jail-based AJCs with direct linkages to community-based AJCs.
- Grants were approximately $500,000 each and covered a 24-month period of performance for planning and implementation.
- Participants in LEAP were mostly male, and education levels varied as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Participant characteristics



Source: LEAP grantee performance reports as of March 31, 2018 (except for one site that reported as of December 31, 2016) describing over 3,000 participants.

HOW TO USE THIS COMPENDIUM

This compendium summarizes key issues important to program operators and policy makers who seek to improve employment outcomes for those involved in the justice system. To gain a broad overview of the planning and implementation of the LEAP pilot grants, read the compendium as a whole, and the briefs in order. If you want to learn more about a specific issue, review the next section which summarizes the findings of each brief and then read the briefs that most interest you. The briefs are organized according to the following four themes:

Jail-community partnerships
Briefs 1 and 2 on pages 9-13

Nuts and bolts of service provision
Briefs 3 through 5 on pages 15-26

Staffing and case management
Briefs 6 and 7 on pages 27-34

Delivery of linked services
Briefs 8 through 10 on pages 35-48

A more comprehensive description and analysis of grantee and participant experiences with the LEAP pilot can be found in the implementation evaluation final report available here: https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/CompletedStudies.htm.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Briefs 1 and 2: Jail–community partnerships

Partnerships between corrections and community-based institutions provide the foundation of service provision for LEAP grantees. Figure 2 illustrates the LEAP model of service provision and how it aims to improve outcomes for participants after release: LEAP participants prepare to work while in jail, and once they are in their communities they continue to receive support from LEAP staff as they work or search for work.

Figure 2. Model of service provision

Learn more about **offering workforce services in partnership with correctional institutions** in Briefs 1 and 2, which describe steps LEAP grantees took to establish partnerships with their justice system partners and launch services collaboratively. Brief 1 (pages 9-10) discusses the challenges associated with working across workforce development and corrections cultures, as well as strategies to mitigate these challenges when operating jail- based AJCs. Brief 2 (pages 11-13) examines the steps LEAP grantees took to launch services quickly, and the role partnerships played in the launch.

Key findings from Brief 1: Bridging Workforce Development and Corrections Cultures (pages 9-10)

- **Ongoing communication is critical.** Bridging the different organizational cultures of workforce development and correctional systems required continuous communication and support between leaders and staff members from both systems.
- **Workforce development staff must acculturate to the jail climate.** Although developing a jail-based AJC requires adjustment by both workforce development and jail partners, the level of accommodation and acculturation was generally higher for workforce staff who viewed themselves as "guests" who needed to conform to jail guidelines and rules.
- **Training and location matter.** Formal staff trainings and co-location of workforce staff at the jail during the planning phase helped to strengthen the jail-based AJCs and acclimate workforce staff to jail culture and norms.

Key findings from Brief 2: Expediting the Launch of Service Provision (pages 11-13)

- **Develop relationships with jail "insiders."** Grantees emphasized the need to develop relationships with trusted jail staff who could both offer useful advice about operations and promote the jail-based AJC to their colleagues.
- **Hold structured, in-person meetings.** Many grantees that achieved an expedited launch stressed the importance of holding in-person meetings to discuss logistics and strengthen partnerships. Key attendees included the LEAP grant project manager, jail reentry coordinator, manager of contractor staff, and senior administrators such as the executive director of the workforce development board and the jail director.
- **Gather relevant data about the jail facility and jail population, including sentencing information, release dates, and the educational backgrounds of inmates.** Working with jail staff on the grant proposal enabled workforce staff to gain useful information about how services could operate in the jail setting. Grantees also gathered important data on the jail population to help design the jail-based AJC to meet participants' needs.

Briefs 3–5: Nuts and bolts of service provision

The LEAP pilots were designed with the idea that intervening with services pre-release is crucial to improving participants' outcomes post-release. Yet, adapting services typically provided in the community to the jail environment is not a straightforward task. All LEAP grantees encountered logistical hurdles with this process. Learn more about the **approaches grantees used to implement and track services given the structure and logistics of the jail environment** in Briefs 3–5, which describe the "nuts and bolts" LEAP grantees used for integrating employment services into the physical space and systems of jail partners. Brief 3 (pages 15–17) describes how grantees integrated the services they provided into jail spaces and schedules, while Brief 4 (pages 19–21) focuses on the logistics of internet provision within jail walls. Brief 5 (pages 23–26) describes the strategies LEAP grantees used to establish systems and track data on participants and services in a corrections setting.

Key findings from Brief 3: Structuring Employment-based Services Within Jail Spaces and Schedules (pages 15-17)

- **The AJC's location affects its programming and accessibility.** The particular facility or area within the facility where the jail-based AJC was located, along with its associated reentry focus and security level, significantly influenced the development of the AJC, the process for participants to access the space, and the negotiations with jail staff to schedule AJC services.
- **Spending time on site early helps.** Early on-site time with jail leadership was critical for understanding space and scheduling parameters, assessing what was feasible, and making the necessary adjustments to plans regarding space and scheduling.
- **Corrections officers are essential partners.** Securing the buy-in of corrections officers was just as important as buy-in from jail administrative staff, given the considerable logistics involved with inmate movement and the complexity of daily jail schedules.

Figure 3. Areas of jail-based AJC operation that may be affected by jail policies

Personalization of Space
- AJC/LEAP signage or wall posters

Supplies
- Furniture types
- Hardcover books
- Metal: staples, paperclips, pencils/pens, pushpins
- Computers and phones
- Other: rulers, spiral binding, plastic folders, whiteboard spray, modified hand tools and laptops

Escorts & Monitoring
- Escorting of inmates to/from housing
- Advance notification to officers
- Security camera monitoring and /or post positions near LEAP space

Procedures
- Initial jail orientation
- Staff movement within jail (keys/access procedures)
- Minimum staff in room
- Maximum participants in room
- Mixing of classification groups in room
- One-on-one interactions with inmates
- Daily accounting and lockdown of supplies when done
- Purchasing/delivery of equipment

Key findings from Brief 4: Internet Access for Pre-Release Job Search Training (pages 19-21)

- **Early planning for internet access is critical.** Planning for Internet installation soon after grant award was critical, given the inherent delays and complexity of establishing Internet access in previously unwired jail settings.
- **The budget must support the work.** Adequate budgeting for both equipment purchases and space upgrades was essential to support Internet installation and access in jails.
- **Programming may need to be adapted to accommodate Internet constraints.** Given heightened Internet security restrictions in jails, jail-based AJCs had to be flexible to adapt their pre- release curricula for this environment.

Key findings from Brief 5: Data Management for Pre- and Post-Release Workforce Services (pages 23-26)

- **Corrections data facilitated grantee activities.** Staff access to corrections data was integral to providing services in the jail—from recruitment, to service delivery, to planning for release.
- **Working in a justice setting brought data-related challenges.** Significant challenges included the strict security of justice data, lack of capacity to modify existing databases, and constrained Internet access for non-jail staff within the jail facility.
- **Harmonizing data systems was a common challenge.** Most sites relied on a mix of paper files and multiple management information systems to track participant data. Aggregating data from multiple sources and entering it into multiple systems created capacity challenges for many sites.

Briefs 6 and 7: Staffing and case management

LEAP grantees had to resolve important questions regarding staffing and case management to deliver the services prescribed by the grant, such as: which staff would they hire, where would they locate staff, and how would they structure staff responsibilities across the jail and community components? Briefs 6 and 7 explore in detail how LEAP grantees **hired staff and structured their case management responsibilities**. Brief 6 (page 27-29) describes the challenges LEAP grantees encountered in the early stage of staffing the jail-based AJCs and the strategies used to overcome these challenges. Brief 7 (page 31-34) discusses the case management models employed by LEAP grantees and how responsibilities were divided across pre- and post-release staff.

Key findings from Brief 6: Staffing Jail-based AJCs (pages 27-29)

- **Grantees struggled to find qualified staff.** Grantees sought to hire staff with a combination of criminal justice experience, workforce development experience, and group facilitation and interpersonal skills but found it difficult to identify candidates who possessed all of these attributes.
- **Lengthy hiring processes made it difficult to onboard staff.** Lengthy background checks required to work in the jails, difficulty recruiting qualified candidates, and long, bureaucratic hiring processes contributed to staffing delays.
- **Engaging partners in the hiring process and being flexible with staffing plans helped mitigate hiring challenges.** To overcome hiring hurdles, LEAP grantees learned from corrections partners about hiring constraints early on, worked with high-level champions to expedite hiring of jail-based AJC staff, adjusted staff roles, and re-allocated already-hired workforce staff to the jail-based AJC when necessary.

Key findings from Brief 7: Case Management Models for Pre- and Post-Release Employment Services (pages 31-34)

- **Pre-release relationships appear to be the foundation of effective post-release case management.** Jail-based staff were reported to drive the connection between jail-based and community-based services through the relationships they develop with participants while they are incarcerated.
- **Connecting participants to community-based case managers before release smoothed transitions.** Linking participants to community-based case managers before release, either through informational meetings or workshops, eased the transition to community-based support after release.
- **Communication between staff is essential for the hand-off to post-release services.** Regular channels of communication between jail-based and community-based staff was critical to maintaining the service plan established in the jail following release.

Briefs 8–10: Delivery of linked services

The linkage of pre- and post-release services is the central feature of LEAP. Briefs 8–10 describe the complementary, linked nature of pre- and post-release service provision from different perspectives. Briefs 8 and 9 discuss service provision in the jail and in the community, respectively; Brief 8 (page 35-38) describes the services the jail-based AJC provided, while Brief 9 (page 39-44) discusses strategies grantees used to engage and serve participants who transition to the community. The final brief, Brief 10 (page 45-48), looks at LEAP from the participant's perspective, and describes the aspects of linked service provision most valued by participants and their suggestions for improvement. Taken as a whole, Briefs 8–10 provide valuable lessons on **how LEAP grantees structured services to support participants before, during, and after the transition** from incarceration to the community.

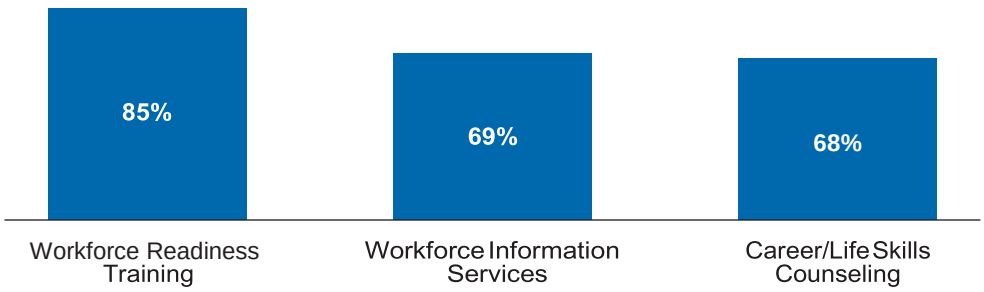
Key findings from Brief 8: Providing Services in a Jail-Based AJC (pages 35-38)

- **Grantees saw job skills and life skills training as two pieces of the same puzzle.** As shown in Figure 4, work readiness training, workforce information services, and career/life skills counseling were the most common pre-release services.
- **Participants valued marketable skills.** Participants valued opportunities to gain marketable skills and to obtain supportive services, such as assistance with obtaining official identification.
- **Some sites provided participants with refreshers just before their release.** Staff felt that refresher activities just before release for participants who had completed pre-release programming could boost participants' chances for post-release success.

Key findings from Brief 9: Engaging in Workforce Services after Release from Jail (pages 39-44)

- **Strong pre-release relationships and communication facilitated engagement post-release.** To increase participant engagement with services after release, sites developed strong relationships with participants during incarceration and communicated clearly about the transition to the community.
- **Staff tried to address participant barriers to engagement post-release.** When working with participants in the community, staff prioritized addressing barriers—such as unstable housing, lack of transportation, and history of substance abuse–that prevented participants from showing up for appointments or interviews.
- **Staff who specialized in post-release service provision provided more intensive support.** Staff who primarily served re-entering individuals reported providing more intensive case management, more support for wraparound services, and more financial incentives for participation than staff who served all AJC customers.

Figure 4. Share of participants who received selected services before release



Source: LEAP grantee performance reports as of March 31, 2018, except for one site that reported as of December 31, 2016. While reports include the percentage of participants that ever received each type of service, some grantees appear to have reported multiple instances of the same participant receiving services. As a result, statistics in this graph should be considered an upper bound.

Key findings from Brief 10: "An opportunity for a reset:" The Experiences of AJC Customers Before and After Release (pages 44 48)

- **Participants valued relationships with LEAP staff.** Participants overwhelmingly reported strong, positive relationships with staff, though in some sites they reported staff members were stretched thin.
- **Staff created an atmosphere of respect.** Participants "felt human" in the jail-based AJCs, primarily because of their interactions with staff.
- **Participants desired more training and better coordination.** Participants desired more occupation-specific skill training and better coordination between jail- and community-based AJC staff and corrections staff to facilitate participation in post-release services and employment.

> "[Staff members] don't look at us any different even though we are in jail. They just look at us like another person looking for help."
>
> AJC focus group participant before release

KEY TAKEAWAYS

This implementation study shows that integrating workforce services into the structure of a jail is not an easy task but one that grantees and participants reported as important and worthwhile. Physical constraints of the jail environment pose challenges to service provision, qualified staff are hard to find, it can be challenging to integrate data systems, and even more challenging to integrate workforce and corrections cultures. The 10 briefs in this compendium describe these challenges in more detail and highlight potential key ingredients for overcoming them. **Across the briefs, several themes emerged as particularly important to linking employment services for justice-involved men and women before and after release.**

First, **grantees reported that early planning and flexibility were essential for designing and implementing a jail-based AJC**. Enabling Internet access, getting needed clearances for program staff, and scheduling services around jail schedules are all time-consuming processes; it makes sense to get started early not just in planning but in engaging with partners and establishing the physical spaces that are integral to service delivery. Flexibility also emerged as an important part of the planning process. Instead of sticking rigidly to their visions for staff hiring and Internet availability, grantees adapted to the circumstances they encountered.

Second, **strong partnerships and clear communication were critical to service implementation and delivery.** LEAP grantees leaned on partnerships with "jail insiders," corrections officers, and jail leadership to bridge cultural differences, identify qualified staff, plan for service delivery within jail structures, access necessary data, and launch services quickly. Structured meetings and frequent communication helped solidify partnerships and keep information flowing.

Finally, **positive relationships between staff and participants set the foundation for participant engagement before and after release.** Grantees reported that forming solid relationships with participants in the jail and connecting with participants as soon as possible after release were key components of engaging participants. Linking participants to community-based case managers before release also eased the transition to community-based services after release.

During the grant period, all 20 sites were successful in developing new jail-based AJCs to provide pre-release services and link participants to post-release services in the community. Workforce development, corrections, and other partners, as well as participants, identified many successes along with significant challenges and promising strategies to address them. The experiences of the LEAP grantees as highlighted in the briefs below suggest important lessons learned and some areas for continued refinement by these grantees or others that may be interested in replicating this innovative approach in similar or other contexts.

About the evaluation

- DOL's Chief Evaluation Office awarded a contract in September 2015 to Mathematica Policy Research and its subcontractor, Social Policy Research Associates (SPR), to evaluate 20 LEAP grants.
- The study goal was to increase knowledge about pro- grams that provide career development and training services to individuals before and after their release from incarceration.
- Mathematica and SPR collected data from the 20 LEAP grantees in their initial implementation phases (early 2016), as well as when the programs were well under way (early 2017) to offer insights into start-up and ongoing implementation of the jail-based AJCs.
- The 10 briefs draw on data collected through two rounds of site visits to each local area for interviews and focus groups with program staff and participants, observations of program services, reviews of sample case files, virtual focus groups with program staff, and grantee performance reports.
- More information about the research methods used is available in the accompanying final report.

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Bridging Workforce Development and Corrections Cultures

Issue Brief 1 — Early Lessons from LEAP

Heather Lewis-Charp, Social Policy Research Associates

August 2016

The creation of specialized American Job Centers (AJCs) in jails requires that workforce development agencies and corrections agencies learn about and adjust to each other's organizational cultures, including priorities, rules, assumptions, and decision-making processes. Although 16 of the 20 local workforce investment boards that received Linking to Employment Activities Pre-release (LEAP) grants had previously provided post-release services to transitioning offenders, only four had prior experience with providing pre-release services in jails. This brief draws on data from visits to all 20 LEAP sites and focuses on the strategies the grantees used during the early planning and implementation period to build common ground between jail and workforce staff in promoting successful reentry for participants.

Study background

This issue brief series explores lessons from the planning phase of the Linking to Employment Activities Pre-release (LEAP) grants. Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, LEAP pilots the creation of jail-based American Job Centers (AJCs) to support the successful reentry of participants and directly link them to community-based AJCs upon release.

Key Findings

- Bridging the different organizational cultures of workforce development and correctional systems required ongoing communication and support between key leaders and staff members from both systems.
- Although developing a jail-based AJC requires adjustment by both workforce development and jail partners, the level of accommodation and acculturation was generally higher for workforce staff who viewed themselves as "guests" who needed to conform to jail guidelines and rules.
- Formal staff trainings and co-location of workforce staff at the jail during the planning phase helped to strengthen the jail-based AJCs and acclimate workforce staff into jail culture and norms.

Context for Partnership and Collaboration

Workforce and jail staff generally had very positive perceptions of the quality of their relationships and saw the creation of a jail-based AJC as part of a longer-term effort to promote collaboration between workforce development and corrections partners. Three factors may have contributed to this perspective:

- **Previous collaboration.** In nine sites, workforce and jail staff had participated in local decision-making bodies such as "reentry councils" or "community corrections partnerships," which helped to lay the groundwork for a jail-based AJC. These bodies brought together public agencies, private companies, nonprofit organizations, and faith-based organizations to address reentry issues. In eight sites (including five from the group just mentioned), workforce and jail staff had collaborated on a previous federal grant-funded reentry effort, such as Face Forward, Second Chance, or Project Rise, and on state- or county-funded reentry initiatives.

In all, staff at 12 sites indicated that the jail and workforce development systems shared a commitment to enhancing reentry services before the grant existed.

- **Supportive policy environments.** State and local policy environments often helped foster buy-in among different kinds of partners for an increased focus on rehabilitation and successful transition. For example, in California—a state where low-level felons are often housed in local jails rather than state prisons—reentry and realignment reforms have emphasized cross-sector partnerships while increasing resources for jail expansion and reentry services. Thus, key partners were looking for ways to collaborate when the LEAP funding was announced.
- **Resource limitations.** Jail staff in four sites embraced the LEAP grant as a way to close a gap in services. These jails were previously unable to offer reentry and workforce services in the jail because of limited staff and resources.

Bridging Jail and Workforce Cultures

Workforce and jail staff at jail-based AJCs emphasized the importance of providing time and space for workforce and jail staff to adjust to one another's organizational cultures. Both explicit and implicit assumptions and values that guided the work of each agency influenced staff members' interactions and decision making, and set the rules for implementing the jail-based AJC.

- **Distinct roles.** According to respondents, the differences between the organizational cultures of jails and workforce systems reflect the distinct roles of their agencies and staff. The primary role of corrections officers is to ensure safety and security, and they focus on "care, custody, and control." To achieve these goals, jails are generally hierarchical; staff must clear decisions through a chain of command and use formal titles such as "commander" and "lieutenant" to refer to one another. Jails also have detailed procedures to regulate inmates' movement, schedules, and programming. In contrast, the primary role of workforce staff is to help clients find and maintain employment, which, in the context of a jail-based AJC, requires staff to help transitioning offenders envision their future outside of the jail. Thus, workforce staff members often tried to make the jail-based AJC feel different from the rest of the jail, with more lighting and brighter colors, motivational posters, and a more professional, business-like environment. They also focused on treating inmates as they would any client in a post-release environment.
- **Workforce staff adjusting to the jail.** Although both jail and workforce staff needed to learn about and adapt to different organizational approaches, workforce staff had to balance their desire to create a post-release culture with the need to conform to the jail rules and setting. A few grantees provided ongoing training and support to staff working in the jail-based AJC to help them navigate this acculturation process. In addition to mandatory jail safety orientations, one grantee instituted its own orientation for workforce staff on navigating jail procedures. Another grantee held weekly check-ins during the start-up period to allow jail-based AJC staff to ask questions, discuss solutions, and debrief about their experiences.

  As guests within the jail, workforce staff saw it as their role to adapt to the jail culture.
- **Orienting jail staff.** Some grantees found it challenging to get buy-in from corrections officers responsible for escorting inmates to the jail-based AJC if the jail staff did not understand the purpose of the center. To address this, one grantee had the jail staff tour a community-based AJC to see what an AJC looks like. Another grantee held an open house for other jail staff to tour the jail-based AJC space and ask questions.
- **Acceptable modifications to jail practices.** The workforce staff in some local areas successfully advocated for modifications to jail practices that were important for the jail-based AJC's atmosphere while ensuring compliance with the jail system's standards on security and strict adherence to protocol. This ranged from selection of paint colors for the walls to permission for inmates to dress in suits for mock interviews. The staff viewed these types of accommodations as essential for creating a space where participants could begin to transition from inmate to job seeker.
- **Variation across jails.** The degree of cross-cultural negotiation varied depending on the structure of the jail. Adaptation was generally easier in more flexible, lower security settings than in more traditional or higher security settings, even for workforce staff who had previous experience working in the jail. Settings where workforce staff reported adjusting quickly included reentry or community corrections centers where the focus was already on rehabilitation and transition back into the community, jail facilities that work primarily with work-release inmates, and jails with a direct supervision model that allows inmates more freedom to move about and interact with jail staff.

Respondents emphasized that it takes time for the jail and workforce system partners to make the accommodations needed to develop a strong collaboration. Thus, LEAP's nine-month planning period proved vital for jail and workforce partners to adjust to each other's organizational cultures and build relationships between jail-based AJC staff and corrections officers. All respondents agreed that the effort is well worthwhile, as it enabled the two partners to actualize how best to achieve their shared vision of improving reentry.

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Other issue briefs in this series by Mathematica Policy Research and Social Policy Research Associates include:

- "Internet Access for Pre-Release Job Search Training" by Hannah Betesh.
- "Expediting the Launch of Service Provision" by Anne Paprocki.
- "Structuring Employment-Based Services Within Jail Spaces and Schedules" by Jennifer Henderson-Frakes.
- "Staffing Jail-Based American Job Centers" by Mika Clark.

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Expediting the Launch of Service Provision

Issue Brief 2 — Early Lessons from LEAP

Anne Paprocki, Social Policy Research Associates

August 2016

Linking to Employment Activities Pre-Release (LEAP) grantees were permitted to spend the first 9 months of the 24-month project period on planning and start-up activities before enrolling participants into their jail-based American Job Centers (AJCs). This brief uses data from site visits to 8 of the 20 Linking to Employment Activities Pre-release (LEAP) sites to explore the factors that enabled them to complete these activities more quickly than the time allotted (see Figure 1).[1] While an expedited launch does not necessarily imply that a grantee will have stronger overall performance, an analysis of grantees that began enrollment quickly provides insight into the conditions present and the strategies used to achieve faster, and perhaps more efficient, implementation.

Study background

This issue brief series explores lessons from the planning phase of the Linking to Employment Activities Pre-release (LEAP) grants. Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, LEAP pilots the cre ation of jail-based American Job Centers (AJCs) to support the successful reentry of participants and directly link them to community-based AJCs upon release.

Key Findings

- Jail-based AJCs that began serving participants early on in the planning period were able to leverage existing staff, curricula, knowledge, and partner experience to roll out services quickly.
- Using the proposal and early planning phases of the grant to solidify the service structure and key relationships helped to expedite the launch of jail-based AJC services.

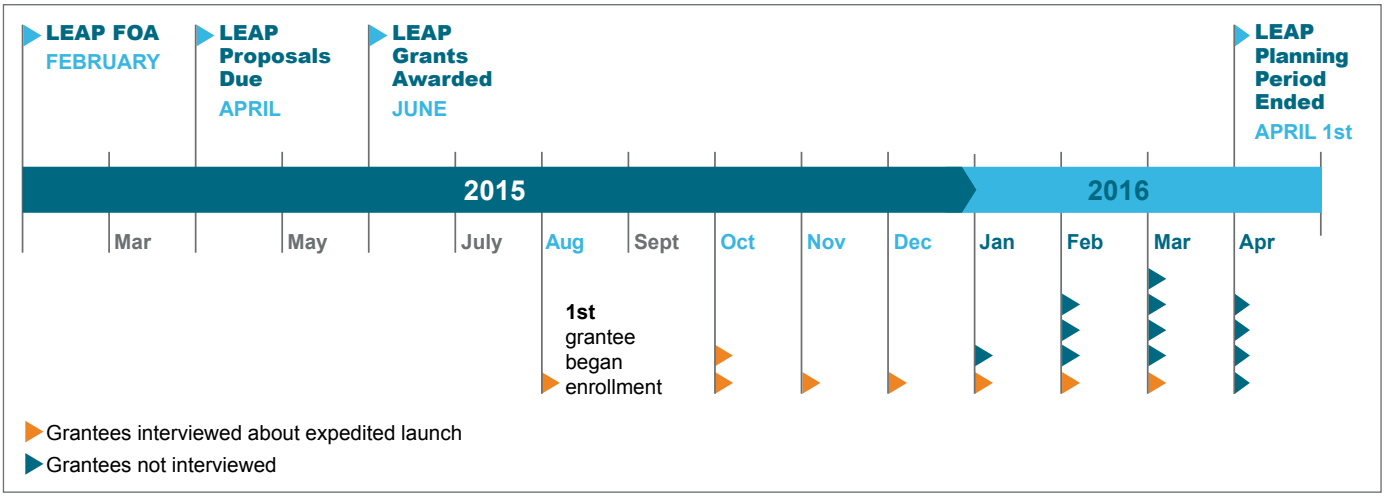
Drawing on Partnerships and Prior Relevant Programs

Jail-based AJCs that started serving participants before the end of the nine-month planning period reported that existing partnerships between workforce development agencies, jails, and criminal justice organizations were an important factor in their expedited launch. Three grantees had managed employment services programs in their jails or operated jail-based AJCs for over five years, and had already completed many key start-up activities. Two of the three were among the earliest to enroll participants, in August and October 2015. For these grantees, LEAP represented an opportunity to strengthen an existing program rather than create something new. However, the other grantees interviewed for this topic still achieved an expedited launch despite having to secure space for the jail-based AJC, achieve buy-in for the development of the AJC, and complete other required start-up activities. This brief provides findings from all eight site visits about this topic, but focuses particularly on insights from the five grantees that achieved an expedited launch despite having to implement their jail-based AJCs from scratch.

Grantees that had not already offered employment services in their jails still drew on partnerships and leveraged the experiences of others to expedite enrollment. For example, many gained criminal justice knowledge through participation in reentry councils or community corrections partnerships. Overall, grantees that achieved an expedited launch were able to:

- **Leverage staff experience working in jails.** As discussed in the companion brief, *Bridging Workforce Development and Corrections Cultures*, several grantees that had existing jail programs transitioned staff to work in the jail-based AJC. However, other grantees still leveraged the experience of Workforce Investment Board (WIB) or contractor staff who had worked in the jail, or hired people who brought this experience.
- **Develop relationships with jail "insiders."** Grantees emphasized the need to develop relationships with trusted jail staff who could both offer useful advice about operations and promote the jail-based AJC to other jail staff. At one site, the jail's reentry coordinator identified key jail decision makers and explained jail procedures so jail-based AJC staff did not waste time with simple questions when they met with senior jail administrators.

Figure 1. LEAP planning period and beginning of enrollment by grantees



FOA=Funding Opportunity Announcement

- **Capitalize on existing services and materials.** While grantees with prior jail-based services had clear service plans and materials to build on, the other grantees also used existing material. Three grantees adapted a curriculum used in the community, such as for a Second Chance grant. Another emphasized soft skills in their jail-based AJC curricula based on employer feedback while serving ex-offenders through another grant.

Leveraging the LEAP Proposal and Grant Planning Phases

Many grantees used the LEAP proposal process to (1) solidify partner commitments and (2) gather information they would need to operate the jail-based AJC effectively. To facilitate start-up, they used several techniques:

- **Target influential champions.** During the proposal phase, four grantees engaged local officials and community leaders, such as judges, to galvanize support for the jail-based AJC. One grantee sought the support of the county executive, who convened a leadership team that included the grantee, jail staff, judges, probation staff, and parole staff to discuss the design of the jail-based AJC. Because the county executive oversees both the WIB and the jail, this support helped focus attention on the project.
- **Collaborate on the proposal and obtain detailed commitments from jail and provider partners.** Collaborating on proposal writing and/or discussing actual design logistics during the process ensured that partners knew their potential commitments under the grant. One grantee noted that they would not have applied for the grant if they felt that the jail did not have sufficient space or would not allow participants to access computers. Another grantee promised the jail that they would support a light-touch version of a jail-based AJC even if they did not win the grant, demonstrating their own commitment and ensuring the jail's buy-in. In contrast, several grantees that did not start enrollment quickly were still working on memoranda of understanding and determining partnership details in the last month of the planning period.
- **Gather relevant data on the jail population, including convictions, eligibility, and education.** Working with jails on the proposal enabled grantees to gain useful information about how services would operate in the jail setting. Grantees also gathered important data on the jail population to help design the jail-based AJC to meet participants' needs. For example, two sites learned that a high percentage of offenders were pre-conviction and/or were frequently transferred to other facilities, and would not be suitable for enrollment. In response, one site revised its plan to target participants on work-release if they were unable to enroll enough eligible offenders in jail. Another site learned that the majority of the jail population had a high school diploma or GED, so they tailored services to individuals who had these credentials and encouraged others to attend the jail's GED program before enrolling at the jail-based AJC. These early insights prevented grantees from being derailed by enrollment challenges or questions of fit once the grant was awarded.

As soon as the grant was awarded, and sometimes before, the grantees interviewed for this brief dove into the planning phase. They emphasized that the following strategies helped them achieve an expedited launch:

- **Begin work in the jail early.** The grantees were eager to get started, and some worked on plans and/or jail space before the LEAP grants were even awarded. As explained in more detail in the companion brief, *Structuring Employment-Based Services Within Jail Spaces and Schedules*, grantees stressed the importance of having jail-based AJC staff spend time in the jail early in the planning phase to understand how the jail-based AJC would work and to acclimate to the environment before enrolling participants.

- **Hold structured, in-person meetings.** Many grantees that achieved an expedited launch stressed the importance of holding in-person meetings to discuss logistics and strengthen partnerships. Several implemented regular meetings with two different groups: (1) key decision-makers, such as the project manager, jail reentry coordinator, and manager of contractor staff; and (2) all partners and senior administrators, such as the WIB executive director and jail director. The core team of key decision-makers would usually meet and then share decisions with the second, larger group. Although grantees that started enrolling participants later also highlighted the importance of communication, several of them noted that they mostly communicated on an ad-hoc basis via phone or email.

An expedited launch was not unexpected for the three grantees that already had years of experience operating a jail-based AJC or providing similar workforce services in their jail. However, the other five grantees interviewed for this topic were able to begin enrollment almost as quickly by leveraging prior experience, learning about jail operations, and capitalizing on and building partnerships. Together these actions created a strong foundation for building a new jail-based AJC and gave grantees the capacity and momentum to achieve an expedited launch.

Endnotes

[1] This brief draws primarily on data from site visits to eight grantees that had an expedited launch, but also includes comparisons to grantees that launched services later in the planning period. While several grantees beyond the eight interviewed for their expedited launch also began enrolling participants during the planning period, none were among the first five to enroll participants, and they were selected to speak on other interview topics.

Suggested citation for this brief: Paprocki, Anne. "Expediting the Launch of Service Provision." Princeton, NJ, and Oakland, CA: Mathematica Policy Research and Social Policy Research Associates, 2016.

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Structuring Employment-Based Services Within Jail Spaces and Schedules

Issue Brief 3 — Early Lessons from LEAP

Jennifer Henderson-Frakes, Social Policy Research Associates

August 2016

Workforce development agencies must navigate jail spaces and inmate schedules to provide American Job Center (AJC) services effectively to inmates transitioning back to the community. The rules guiding the use of jail space and the scheduling of inmate activities can be complex and vary considerably based on each jail's structure, security level, reentry focus, and existing programming. This brief discusses how LEAP workforce development staff worked with jail administrators to gain access to jail space and their strategies for scheduling services inside the jail-based AJC. It relies on data gathered through site visits to eight LEAP sites during the planning period for LEAP, as well as tours of all 20 jail-based AJCs being implemented by grantees.

Study background

This issue brief series explores lessons from the planning phase of the Linking to Employment Activities Pre-release (LEAP) grants. Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, LEAP pilots the creation of jail-based American Job Centers (AJCs) to support the successful reentry of participants and directly link them to community-based AJCs upon release.

Key Findings

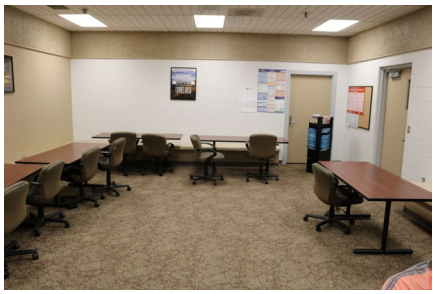
- The particular facility or area within the facility where the jail-based AJC was located, along with its associated reentry focus and security level, significantly influenced the development of the AJC, the process for participants to access the space, and the negotiations around scheduling of AJC services.
- Early onsite time with jail leadership and staff was critical for understanding space and scheduling parameters, assessing what was feasible, and making necessary adjustments.
- Securing the buy-in of corrections officers was just as important as buy-in from jail administrative staff, given the considerable logistics involved with inmate movement and the complexity of daily jail schedules.

Identifying Space for Jail-Based AJC Services

To establish a jail-based AJC, sites first had to identify and prepare space within the jail. The rules guiding the use of jail space could be complex and vary considerably between sites. However, all sites had to weigh the need to adhere to security requirements with the desire to create a suitable space—that is, one conducive to learning and employment preparation. Several lessons emerged on preparing spaces within the jails:

- **The jails' security level and reentry focus influenced the availability of appropriate space.** Facilities accustomed to incarcerating inmates at lower security levels typically already had a reentry focus and had suitable learning spaces, complementary programming, and relative freedom of movement for inmates. In addition, relatively newer jails or jail areas tended to have designs and layouts that were more compatible with an emphasis on rehabilitation and reentry programming, and thus were more suitable for a jail-based AJC.
- **Most grantees did not have a choice of jail spaces for the specialized AJC, so they used what was available.** Availability was the dominant factor in identifying space for the jail-based AJC. When there was a choice of spaces, grantees considered such factors as proximity to target populations (such as work release inmates) and the need for inmate escorts, which had considerable logistical and financial implications for the jail. Eleven of the jail-based AJCs visited had access to at least some space that they did not share with other programs, whereas the other nine either shared all of their spaces or were still determining sharing plans as of March 2016.
- **Jail-based AJCs were often located in or adjacent to housing units and/or educational areas.** Educational areas often included classrooms and programming space such as a library, computer lab, vocational shops, a chaplain's room, or a medical office. For nearly half of the sites, the primary jail-based AJC space consisted of a single room, often a classroom. The remaining sites had access to

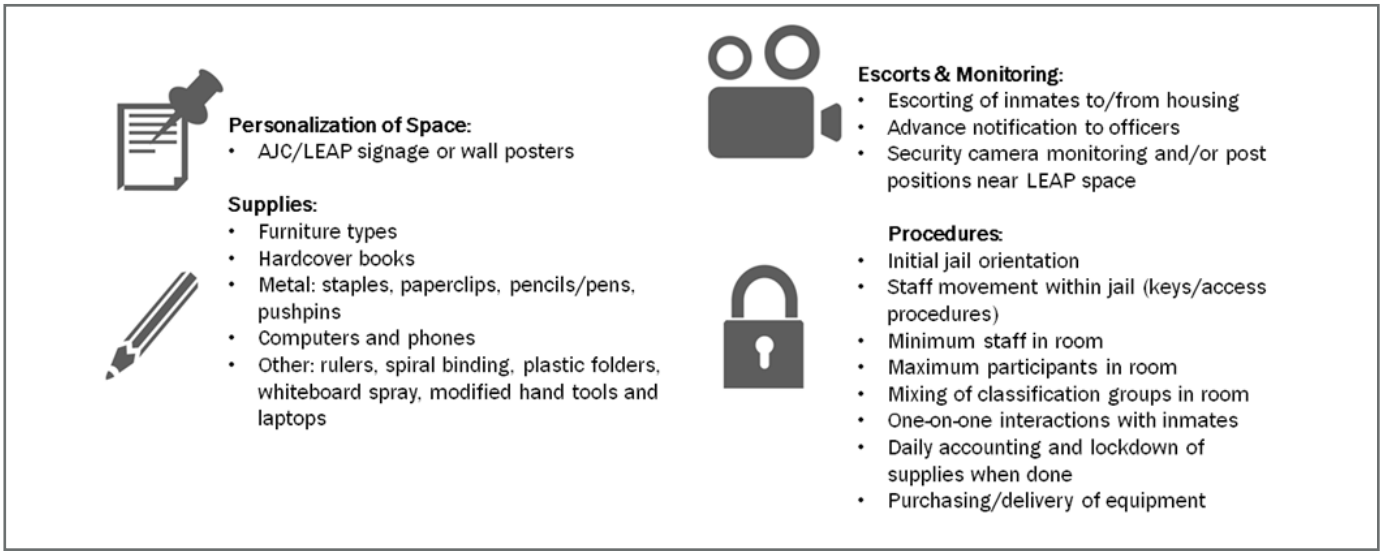
multiple primary spaces, including classrooms, computer labs, libraries, and/or staff office spaces. Most spaces lacked exterior windows, but had interior windows for monitoring. Three sites used a gym, multipurpose room, or open space in a housing pod. Only one site had its primary AJC space in a standalone building for inmate programming.



- **Jail areas intended for reentry programming needed little remodeling.** Jail-based AJCs located in spaces not intended for reentry programming had to undergo various renovations, including replacing old furniture, painting, and wiring for computer and Internet access (see companion brief *Internet Access for Pre-Release Job Training* for information on securing Internet access in jail-based AJCs).

In addition to being affected by the jails' existing layout, security level, and reentry focus, specific policies and restrictions also influenced how the jail-based AJC space could be configured, operated, and utilized. Figure 1 illustrates how jail policies, which vary considerably across jails, could influence operation of a jail-based AJC.

Figure 1. Areas of jail-based AJC operation that may be affected by jail policies



- **Personalization of space.** About half of the jail-based AJCs had some simple AJC or LEAP signage such as a decal, poster, or banner. The other half were not allowed to personalize the space due to space-sharing considerations or rules prohibiting posters or wall decorations.
- **Supplies.** Allowable materials and supplies significantly influenced the use of jail-based AJC space. Many jails prohibited various forms of metal, including staples and pushpins, as well as furniture and supplies that could be repurposed as weapons such as hardcover books. Grantees and jail-based AJC staff had to coordinate closely with the jails to order furniture and supplies that met jail requirements.
- **Escorts and monitoring.** In developing their services, jail-based AJC staff needed to consider whether the jail required that escorts accompany inmates to and from AJC services and whether they needed to notify correctional officers in advance when inmates were scheduled to attend activities. Other forms of monitoring included security cameras and posted officer positions in or near jail-based AJC spaces.
- **Procedures.** A number of jail procedures guided staff's ability to prepare and use jail-based AJC spaces. These include minimum and maximum numbers of participants allowed in a room; rules against mixing security levels, genders, or individuals considered "incompatible" given combative history or gang affiliations; restricted access to restrooms for staff; and requirements to count and securely store supplies after class.

As a result, the jail-based AJCs visited for this study represented a wide range in atmosphere and features. Most were relatively sparse classrooms with desks, tables, chairs, and assorted equipment such as whiteboards, projector screens, computers, and filing cabinets. Many were also not strongly identifiable as an AJC, but a few grantees were able

to design the space to mirror the look and feel of their community-based AJCs to some extent—for example, with customized signage, inspirational posters, and employment-related materials. At least two sites also promoted the feel of a community-based AJC by securing permission for inmates to wear professional clothing while in the jail-based AJC.

Scheduling Jail-Based AJC Services

All sites had to adapt their jail-based AJCs not only to jail spaces but also to inmate schedules. Integrating AJC services into jail operations and inmate schedules required flexibility, coordination, and learning the ins and outs of jail procedures. This made it important to gain the buy-in of correctional officers—for example, by spending time at the jail prior to enrollment to network with officers or by holding an open house. While jail schedule details varied, they were always critical considerations for how and when to schedule jail-based AJC services.

- **Jail social service or programming coordinators often helped to schedule services.** Jail-based AJC staff usually worked with jail coordinators to determine an initial schedule and have it approved by jail leadership such as program directors or deputy wardens. At jails where enrollment in jail-based AJC services had begun shortly before the site visits, ongoing scheduling was relatively informal; staff might reserve time on a dry erase board or a paper schedule. As the number of participants increases and the AJC needs more time or space in the jail, jails may have to revisit the scheduling process.
- **AJC programming needed to account for other aspects of jail life.** Services had to be scheduled around head counts for inmates, lockdowns, mealtimes, laundry exchange, and visiting hours. Schedules also had to account for times inmates would not be available, such as when working in the jail or at work-release assignments for up to 40 hours per week, or when attending other jail programming. An instructor in one site divided a daylong class into smaller blocks of time over multiple days. AJC staff also reported working nights and weekends to accommodate participants' other commitments. Time required to escort inmates could also affect the schedule. In at least two sites, jails adapted their schedules to make it easier to find time for services—one moved laundry exchange to the evening and another allowed head counts while inmates were in class instead of requiring them to return to their bunks.
- **Staff need to be flexible in the face of unanticipated events.** Jail-based AJC staff reported having to accommodate any unexpected changes to their schedule. For example, if an inmate could not be located, a regularly scheduled head count could encroach on class time, requiring an instructor to catch up on material during the next session. Emergency lockdowns due to fights or security breaches could result in cancellation of a class altogether.

> Some workforce staff reported they had initially underestimated the complexity of scheduling and operations in a correctional facility.

- **Restrictions on inmate interaction further complicated scheduling.** As mentioned above, jails may not permit certain groups of inmates to interact, such as males and females. In response, jail-based AJC staff sometimes needed to schedule services in cohorts or in smaller groups than originally anticipated.

Establishing a jail-based AJC presented two core, interrelated challenges: the jail as a new working environment, and the jail's complex procedures and schedules. This required flexibility in an environment where security is top priority and schedules could change unexpectedly. In response, workforce staff spent early on-site time at the jail to: become accustomed to the environment without the pressure of service delivery; have candid conversations with jail staff about the feasibility of specialized AJC plans within jail parameters; and secure additional buy-in from jail staff, including correctional officers.

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Internet Access for Pre-Release Job Search Training

Issue Brief 4 — Early Lessons from LEAP

Hannah Betesh, Social Policy Research Associates

August 2016

Securing Internet access is a critical planning issue for the creation of a jail-based American Job Center (AJC). Community-based AJCs increasingly offer resources via the Internet, as the majority of job search activities and applications now occur online;[1] however, correctional facilities often do not offer any Internet access for inmates due to security concerns. In jails where Internet access *is* available, it is generally for purposes unrelated to job search, such as legal research and distance learning, and in designated areas such as a law library or classroom.[2] Arranging Internet access for the purpose of job search inside a jail-based AJC therefore represents a new and complex endeavor in the jail environment. This brief uses data from site visits to 8 of the 20 Linking to Employment Activities Pre-release (LEAP) sites to explore the role of Internet access in pre-release employment services as well as the resources, staffing, and infrastructure needed to establish Internet access for a jail-based AJC.

Study background

This issue brief series explores lessons from the planning phase of the Linking to Employment Activities Pre-release (LEAP) grants. Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, LEAP pilots the creation of jail-based American Job Centers (AJCs) to support the successful reentry of participants and directly link them to community-based AJCs upon release.

Key Findings

- Given heightened Internet security restrictions in jails, jail-based AJCs had to be flexible to adapt their pre-release curricula for this environment.
- Planning for Internet installation soon after grant award was critical, given the inherent delays and complexity of establishing Internet access in previously unwired jail settings.
- Adequate budgeting for both equipment purchases and space upgrades was essential to support Internet installation and access in jails.

Role of Internet Access in Pre-Release Services

The jail-based AJCs established by LEAP grantees planned to use the Internet for pre-release job search instruction, online basic skills and career interest assessments, and, in some cases, occupational skills training. Half of the jail-based AJCs were also offering or planned to offer formal computer and Internet skills instruction. As grantees discovered, however, Internet security settings inside jails often preclude access to multimedia and private business sites. Due to these restrictions, the jail-based AJCs implemented two key modifications to their pre-release job search programming:

- Due to restrictions on access to employer websites, jail-based AJCs shifted pre-release instruction on job applications to use paper applications or Microsoft Word versions of Internet applications saved offline. Community-based AJCs then planned to provide post-release instruction on the online component of the process, including selecting drop-down fields and electronically submitting the application. Because pre-release participants cannot access employer websites for background research or to check job openings, pre-release job search shifted to exploring local labor market trends and aggregated job search sites such as Monster and Indeed.
- Due to both Internet security settings and bandwidth limitations, three of the eight jail-based AJCs could not offer access to instructional videos or interactive media. These grantees needed to modify curricula (such as having participants read transcripts of videos), delay certain services until post-release (such as interactive occupational skills training programs), and/or make a substantial investment in a fiber optic line with sufficient bandwidth for instructional media.

Jail-based AJC staff also often needed to adjust to providing case management without immediate access to web-based case management systems. These systems are widely used for participant tracking in community-based AJCs, but were not always accessible inside

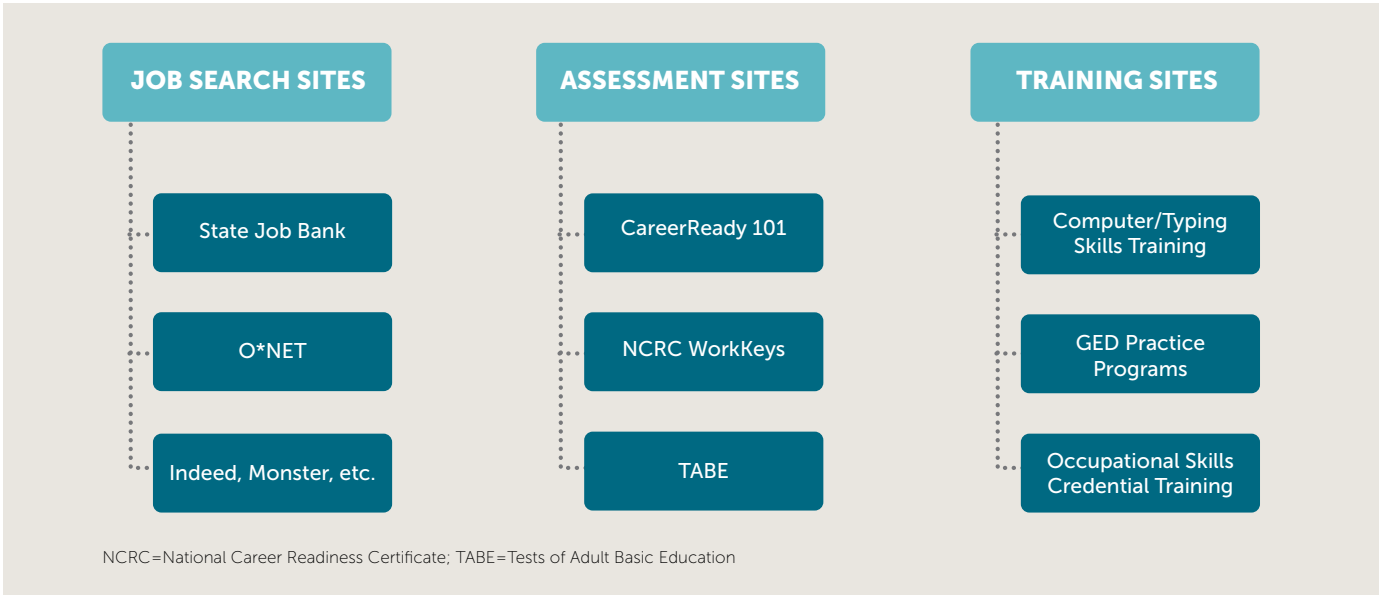
of jail-based AJCs. This meant that some jail-based AJC staff were not able to enter data or review Internet-based case management notes to recall a participant's goals and progress while working in the jail-based AJC. Some staff adapted by maintaining hard copies of participant files that could be brought into the jail-based AJC.

Required Resources, Staffing, and Infrastructure

Developing and executing plans for delivering Internet-based services involved early and frequent collaboration between jail and Workforce Investment Board (WIB) staff, both at the leadership level and between information technology (IT) staff. Key stages of this process included:

- **Finalizing Internet access plans and configuring equipment for secure Internet access in the jail setting.** Local partners first had to determine whether an existing, secure Internet connection could be used for the jail-based AJC or if a new connection needed to be established. Through extensive discussions at the proposal stage and during the initial two to six months of the grant, jail and WIB leadership (in collaboration with jail and workforce IT staff or jail-approved IT contractors) at seven of eight grantees agreed on a plan for Internet access, computer purchases, and computer configuration that complied with jail security requirements.[3]
- **Development of an approved website "white list."** All seven jail-based AJCs that were able to install Internet connections limited accessible websites to a documented "white list" of approved websites for job search, assessment, and training (see Figure 1 for examples). Because most jails had not previously offered any Internet-based job search training, workforce development staff at each site developed these white lists based on experience delivering similar services in community-based AJCs. Both jail leadership and jail IT staff needed to approve these lists to ensure that they were sufficiently secure and relevant to job search skills instruction. Grantees described the process of developing and finalizing these lists as an important priority and milestone in planning their jail-based AJCs.
- **Wiring and installation.** After Internet access plans and white lists were approved, grantees still needed to engage other county departments (such as a county public works department or county IT department) or use outside vendors to survey the space, pursue structural modifications for wiring, and install Internet access. It was important to clarify early in the planning phase which county departments needed to be involved and what procurement processes and clearance procedures would be required for outside vendors to work inside the jail.

Figure 1. Examples of "White List" Websites Approved for Pre-Release Services



NCRC=National Career Readiness Certificate; TABE=Tests of Adult Basic Education

Challenges Encountered and Strategies for Navigating Them

Two primary challenges emerged as grantees arranged for Internet access in jail-based AJCs:

- **Unplanned costs.** Spending on Internet installation ranged from $7,000 to $30,000, and four of the eight grantees spent more than planned. Most jail buildings have thick concrete walls and floors, and some grantees had not planned for the extensive work needed to drill for appropriate wiring.[4] Some grantees also had planned to repurpose older computers but discovered that jail IT security policies required that all machines be delivered directly from the manufacturer to ensure they did not have any unauthorized programs installed.

- **Unanticipated delays.** At the time of the site visits—approximately one month before the end of the planning period, four of the eight jail-based AJCs still did not have Internet access due to various delays.
  - **Delays in obtaining approval for Internet access plans from jail directors and IT staff.** These delays occurred either because stakeholders needed more time to resolve differences in vision or, in one case, because there was turnover in jail leadership positions during the planning process.
  - **Delays due to jail infrastructure issues.** Four of the grantees could not move forward until they addressed infrastructure issues to prepare the space for Internet installation, such as installing additional electrical outlets.
  - **Delays due to county procurement processes and Internet service provider availability.** Although specific procedures vary by jail, generally all work orders—for example, for drilling to create ports and electrical outlets, or for contractors to configure machines to meet jail security settings—had to go through an extensive contractor procurement process. Internet access installation also required using an Internet service provider, such as Comcast or AT&T, which often have long wait lists for major projects.

Grantees reported that the following factors helped them navigate these challenges:

- **High-level support from jail leadership.** Securing buy-in from jail administrators at the proposal stage minimized the need for continued discussions (after grant award) about whether to allow Internet access in the jail, and enabled grantees to focus on installation details. Three grantees also noted that support of an entity with oversight over both jails and WIBs, such as a county executive, helped expedite Internet installation.
- **Early planning.** Grantees stressed the importance of developing a detailed plan for Internet access in collaboration with jail leaders and for jail IT staff to review that plan as early as possible, even at the proposal stage. This could help to anticipate time-intensive processes and potential infrastructure costs. They also suggested that early identification of the websites necessary for planned pre-release programming was important for timely review and approval by jail leadership and IT staff.

Internet installation in a jail setting is a complex endeavor that requires close collaboration between workforce development and jail partners, at both the leadership level and between technical staff from both entities. Three key approaches—flexibility, advanced planning, and adequate budgeting—were critical for ensuring successful installation despite the inherent complications of attempting to arrange Internet access in a jail-based AJC.

Endnotes

[1] D'Amico, Ronald, et al. "Providing Public Workforce Services to Jobseekers: Findings from the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Program Gold Standard Evaluation." Prepared by Social Policy Research Associates for U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Employment and Training Administration (ETA). Washington, DC: DOL, ETA, forthcoming.

[2] Dryden, Benjamin R. "Technological Leaps and Bounds: Pro Se Prisoner Litigation in the Internet Age." University of Pennsylvania Journal of Constitutional Law, vol. 10, May 2008, pp. 819; Institute for Higher Education Policy. "Unlocking Potential: Results of a National Survey of Postsecondary Education in State Prisons." Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2011.

[3] One grantee revised its service plan to offer pre-release services without Internet access, because, after submitting the proposal, their jail partner implemented strict regulations prohibiting use of computers, cell phones, and tablets in secure areas of the jail.

[4] Most grantees are using hardwired, rather than wireless, Internet. The only grantees that were using wireless Internet are those that already had wireless Internet in inmate-accessible areas before LEAP.

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Data Management for Pre- and Post-Release Workforce Services

Issue Brief 5 – Lessons from LEAP

Jillian Stein, Mathematica Policy Research

May 2018

In 2015, 20 LEAP grantees established jail-based AJCs to offer employment-related services to incarcerated individuals and connect them to further support immediately upon their release into the community. To successfully provide—and link—these jail- and community-based services, grantees needed to collect and synthesize data gathered by different stakeholders, including jail administrators, workforce administrators, case managers in the jail- and community-based AJCs, partner service providers, and participants.[1] For most grantees, this was their first attempt to track data across corrections and workforce systems. Decisions included whether to use or modify existing data systems and how to manage data flow between organizations. This brief describes how grantees collected, managed, and used data to recruit inmates, track service delivery from pre- to post-release, stay in touch with participants, and measure outcomes.

Study background

This issue brief series explores lessons from the evaluation of the Employment and Training Administration's Linking to Employment Activities Pre release (LEAP) grants, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Chief Evaluation Office. LEAP pilots the creation of jail based American Job Centers (AJCs) to support the successful reentry of participants and directly link them to community based AJCs upon release. The evaluation looks at approaches to providing services before and after incarceration across 20 sites based on site visits, phone interviews, focus groups, and grantee performance reports.

Key Findings

- Gaining access to corrections data was critical to providing AJC services in the jail—from recruitment, to service delivery, to planning for release.
- Most sites relied on a mix of paper files and multiple MISs to track participant data. Key challenges included the strict security of justice data, lack of capacity to modify existing databases, and lack of staff internet access from within jails.
- Aggregating data from multiple sources and entering it into multiple systems created capacity challenges for many sites. Staff often had to double- and sometimes triple-enter information across systems

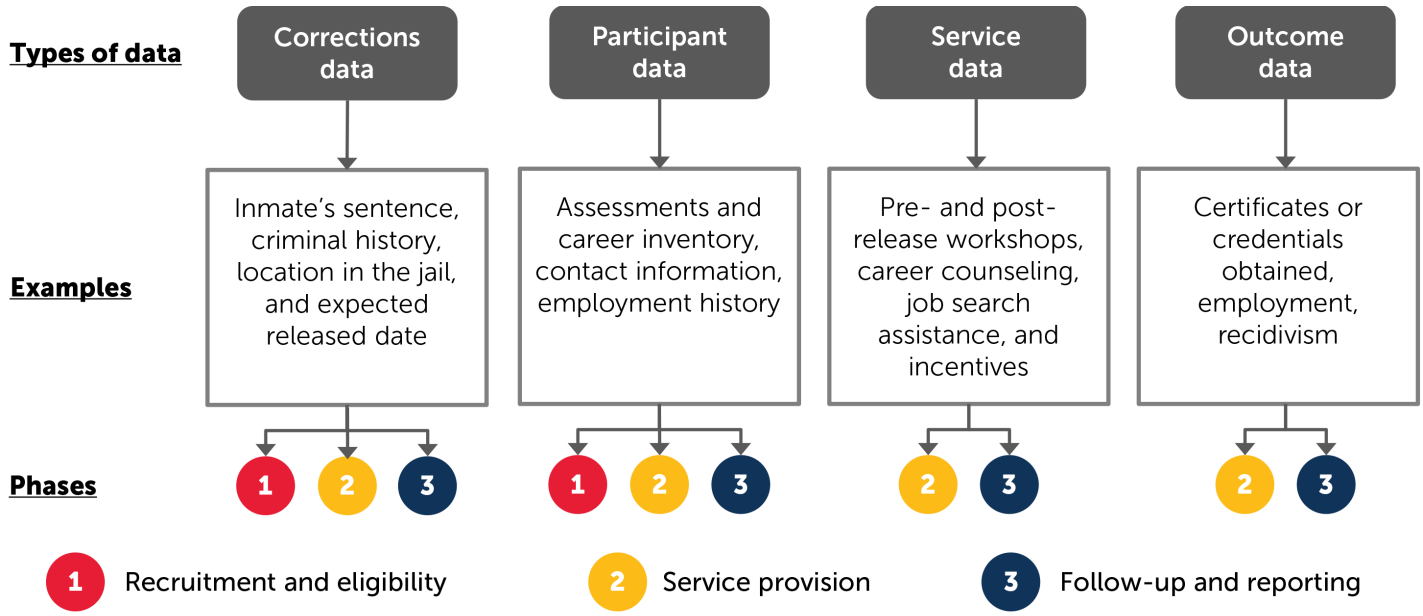
Types and uses of data collected

Sites integrated data from multiple sources throughout the phases of serving reentering individuals (Figure 1). Staff used data to identify potential participants, determine eligibility, plan programming, reengage participants in the community, and measure outcomes. Four main types of data were collected:

- **Corrections and jail facility data.** Jail-based AJC staff needed access to corrections data to (1) identify eligible participants (sentencing, criminal history, and expected release date), [2] (2) locate participants to escort them to programming (location within the jail), and (3) plan for participants' release (expected release date and community where they are expected to reside). Staff in most sites looked up participants in the corrections system and transferred relevant data manually to hard-copy case files or into a separate Excel or an internet-based MIS.
- **Participant characteristics data**. Staff collected a range of data about participants including background characteristics, contact information, demographics, needs, interests, and work readiness, often through various assessments. These data were used to determine eligibility, plan for services, keep track of participants and encourage them to come to the community AJC after release.

- **Service receipt data.** Staff who provided pre- and post-release services to participants were responsible for tracking the services delivered, including counseling, workshops, job search assistance, incentives, and other services. These data were mostly used for grant management and reporting but some sites also used them for program improvement. For example, some sites discovered through data tracking early in the grant period that participants had low rates of engagement after release; in response, sites introduced incentives for post-release participation and used data to assess the efficacy of the incentives. Jail-based AJC staff in three sites also reported participants' attendance at pre-release services to the jail.
- **Outcome data.** DOL required grantees to collect data to document participants' progress toward employment and successful re-entry for one year after release from jail, including completion of educational programs (and receipt of certificates or other credentials), employment and earnings information, and recidivism. In addition to grant reporting, grantees sometimes shared outcome data with partners and external stakeholders to help them assess program performance and to garner continued support for the program.

Figure 1. Types of data collected for reentry services, including uses and sources



Common approaches and challenges to collecting and tracking data

Approaches to data collection varied considerably across the sites for each major phase of serving participants. This variation stemmed from factors such as whether jail-based AJC staff had access to the jail database, whether they had internet access inside the jail, whether the same or different organizations provided pre-release and post-release services, and whether sites were able to customize existing databases to track participants. This section describes how sites accessed, used, and stored data during (1) recruitment and eligibility, (2) service provision, and (3) follow-up and reporting.

Recruitment and eligibility. Participating jails reported that, on average, about 40 percent of inmates in their facilities were sentenced, with rates ranging from 4 to 93 percent across sites.[3] Staff in some sites felt that finding the sentenced individuals was like "finding a needle in a haystack." With the help of corrections partners, jail-based AJC staff in 12 of the 20 sites were able to gain access to jail data to identify and recruit potential participants. Across these 12, staff in 8 sites were given access to the jail MIS, whereas staff in 4 sites had access to paper records (such as booking or rap sheets) or inmate reports the jail generated daily or weekly.

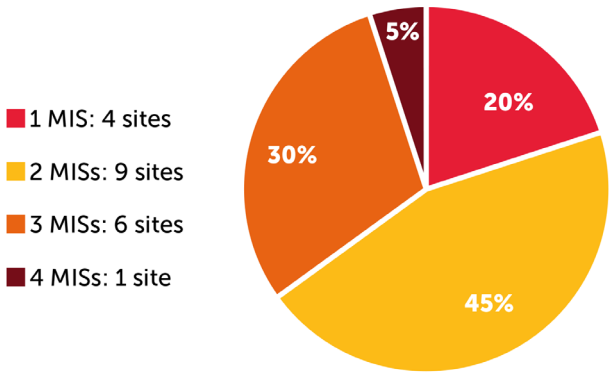
The remaining eight sites relied on self-referrals from inmates or referrals from jail staff to the jail-based AJC. When sites relied on corrections staff to identify and refer inmates, the quality of referrals depended on the

corrections staff's knowledge of eligibility requirements, their buy-in to the value of jail-based AJC services, and their capacity to spend time identifying potential participants.

Service provision. Sites used various approaches to track participant services, but all used a mix of paper files and one or more MISs. Interviews revealed the following strategies and challenges with service tracking:

- **Given the challenges of linking databases, partners developed processes to share data to the extent possible.** Linking data across systems can require intense coordination, including data-sharing agreements, technical specifications, and software programming to export and import data from one system to another. As a result, none of the participating sites linked data systems across corrections and workforce entities, noting security concerns and funding as hurdles. Instead, staff in eight jail-based AJCs were able to gain direct access to the jail MIS; in one of these sites they had read-write access which they used to enter class attendance and case notes for the jail. Sites where staff did not have direct access to jail data reported that it hindered their ability to provide services; in one site, jail-based AJC staff could not access accurate release dates, case file numbers, or contact information for participants.
- **Half of sites used the state workforce MIS as their primary database.** Of the 20 sites, 10 reported that they entered records for all participants into the state workforce system regardless of enrollment in other programs. Another four sites entered participants into the state system only if they qualified for WIOA adult, dislocated worker or youth programs. In the remaining six sites, staff reported that they did not enter participants into the state MIS, either to avoid duplicative data entry or due to concerns that entering jail-based AJC participants would negatively affect their WIOA performance metrics.
- **Staff had to double- and sometimes triple-enter information across different entities (Figure 2).** When an organization other than the WDB provided pre- or post-release services, staff from that organization often needed to input data into their own MIS as well as into the state workforce MIS. In addition, some sites needed to use other systems or software to tabulate participants' baseline, service, and outcome information to submit grantee performance reports to DOL, such as a separate Access database. Staff at one site also entered data into a corrections database so jail administrators and probation officers could monitor participants' attendance. In most sites, the project manager was responsible for reconciling data sources across MISs and tabulating data for the grantee performance reports, but three sites had a data manager who helped manage the analysis and reporting for many grant streams, including LEAP, which they found eased the burden on the project manager.

Figure 2. Number of MISs used by sites



- **Several sites reported a lack of time or resources to modify their existing MIS.** Many sites wanted to modify their organization's MIS to track services, but few felt they had enough time or resources to implement these changes. Smaller organizations had fewer resources dedicated to data management and hence were unable or hesitant to invest in developing an MIS specific to DOL's data definitions for a short-term grant (LEAP grants were initially awarded for 24 months). A few grantees suggested that greater uniformity between DOL grant requirements and the requirements for WIOA or other federal funding might make them more inclined to invest in developing or modifying an existing MIS so it could be useful beyond the life of the current grant.
- **Regardless of the number of MISs used to track services, sites often struggled with poor internet connections or a complete lack of access to the internet from the jail.** Staff in six sites had to leave the jail with paper files to enter pre-release service data at the community-based AJC or service provider's office. Sometimes this data entry occurred days or weeks after the services were provided, which could introduce errors and make it more difficult for staff to recall sufficient detail when entering data. Staff in one site entered case notes for pre-release participants

monthly at the community AJC and reported that this delay sometimes prevented community AJC staff from having the most current contact information for released participants.

Follow-up and reporting. Sites collected outcome data on participants' education, employment, and recidivism to track performance and submit quarterly reports to DOL. These data came from a mix of sources including participants, employers, community-based staff, and corrections staff (such as parole and probation officers).

- **Staff relied on communication with participants to track outcomes.** Staff working with participants after release were usually responsible for tracking down and recording when participants secured employment or earned a credential. They typically verified information provided by participants through paystubs or directly with employers or educational institutions. Because participants were often a primary source of outcome data, if staff lost touch with the participants, it became difficult to update their status.
- **Most sites relied on corrections partners to identify participants who recidivated, though the level of detail differed across sites.** Three sites were able to learn if participants returned to any correctional facility in their state, while four sites were only able to identify individuals who returned to the same facility, which meant that it was harder to track recidivism for participants who committed new crimes in another county and were sent to a different jail or prison. Two sites used public databases to track recidivism. Staff found that participants often returned to jail for reasons other than for new crimes, such as for violations of parole or probation, missed court dates, or prior outstanding warrants.

Conclusion

Communities interested in starting a jail-based AJC that links participants to community-based services after release should consider both their short-term and long-term data needs in developing strategies to manage participant and performance data. Implementing data access and sharing agreements between the corrections and workforce systems or identifying other strategies to link data could improve service delivery and reduce staff burden for data entry. Dedicated staff for data management could also ease the burden on case managers and administrators, so they can focus on engaging and serving participants.

Endnotes

[1] Jail- and community-based AJC staff were typically employees of the workforce board or a service provider operating the AJC, but sometimes pre- and/or post-release services were provided by staff from a community-based organization.

[2] See FOA-ETA-15-03, Linking to Employment Activities Pre-release Specialized American Job Centers (AJCs), U.S. Department of Labor, ETA, for details on eligibility requirements for participation in LEAP services.

[3] Estimate is based on available data from 16 of the 20 sites.

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Other issue briefs in this series by Mathematica Policy Research and Social Policy Research Associates include:

- "Providing Services in a Jail-based American Job Center," by Jennifer Henderson-Frakes
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- "Engaging Participants in Workforce Services after Release from Jail," by Samina Sattar

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MATHEMATICA Policy Research

SPR SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Staffing Jail-Based American Job Centers

Issue Brief 6 — Early Lessons from LEAP

Mika Clark, Social Policy Research Associates

August 2016

To operate specialized American Job Centers (AJCs) within jail facilities, workforce development agencies had to adapt their standard approaches to hiring and staffing to accommodate the operations and security requirements of the jail and hiring processes of various partners. Drawing on data from site visits to seven LEAP sites, this brief explores their approach to staffing jail-based AJCs, including the varying staffing configurations, key staff qualifications, hiring and onboarding processes, and strategies to expedite hiring based on lessons learned.

Study background

This issue brief series explores lessons from the planning phase of the Linking to Employment Activities Pre-release (LEAP) grants. Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, LEAP pilots the creation of jail-based American Job Centers (AJCs) to support the successful reentry of participants and directly link them to community-based AJCs upon release.

Key Findings

- Grantees sought to hire staff with a combination of criminal justice experience, workforce development experience, group facilitation skills, and interpersonal skills, but found it difficult to find candidates who possessed all of these skills.
- Lengthy background checks required to work in the jails, difficulty recruiting qualified candidates, and long, bureaucratic hiring processes contributed to staffing delays.
- Engaging partners in the hiring process and being flexible with staffing plans helped mitigate hiring challenges.

STAFFING CONFIGURATIONS

To staff the jail-based AJC, sites had to decide which types of staff to hire and which partner agencies should provide services. Below is a summary of the common approaches used by the seven sites visited:

- **Services were delivered to participants by three to six staff on a cross-agency team or by the local workforce development agency.** Sites considered the expertise of their different partners to determine whose staff should provide the core jail-based AJC services. Partners typically included county jails and local workforce development agencies, but sometimes also included community-based organizations (CBOs) and educational institutions. Workforce development agencies that lacked experience providing reentry services often relied on staff from their experienced CBO or jail partners to provide case management or, in two cases, to lead the operation of the jail-based AJC. Grantees typically formed a core team of one project manager and two to three direct service staff who provided case management, job readiness training, and employment services. Some grantees also recruited volunteer mentors and hired vocational instructors and job development staff to support the team.
- **Roles of jail staff ranged from coordination to supporting partners to delivering most direct services.** In most sites, jail staff involvement was limited to coordinating activities, such as identifying jail space, facilitating scheduling, approving materials, recruiting and screening participants, and escorting participants to the jail-based AJC. However, at two of the seven sites, the jails had a history of delivering case management or job training services, so jail staff provided direct services to participants, ranging from supplemental job search support to core service components.

- **Four of the seven sites used the same staff for pre- and post-release services.** Sites that used the same staff for both roles believed that this staffing configuration would give participants a sense of continuity and stability during reentry, as well as a familiar face to help connect them to the community-based AJC upon release. In contrast, other sites differentiated these roles to allow staff to specialize in the activities related to different stages of services, such as workshop facilitation for pre-release staff and job development for post-release staff. This approach made it easier to find suitable job candidates.

DESIRED STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

All sites looked for job applicants with experience in criminal justice, workforce development, group facilitation, and case management, as well as strong interpersonal skills and a desire to work with vulnerable populations. According to respondents, specific desired qualifications included:

- **Experience with the criminal justice system.** According to the sites, the ideal job candidates: (1) know how to integrate themselves in the jail environment, (2) feel comfortable working in a locked-down facility, and (3) understand the unique challenges faced by individuals involved in the criminal justice system. However, respondents felt that candidates who had worked exclusively as correctional officers might find it difficult to transition from maintaining security inside the jail to providing support to individuals transitioning to the community.
- **Experience in workforce development.** Candidates should understand the workforce system, have case management experience, and be able to connect individuals transitioning to the community with employment services, job training, and employers without extensive support.
- **Effective group facilitation skills.** Ideal candidates are dynamic presenters with experience leading group trainings and workshops.

- **Strong interpersonal skills.** The ideal candidates have a special set of relational skills that enable them to (1) perform within the structure and hierarchy of the jail environment, (2) bring flexibility and creativity to career development, (3) engage and relate to participants facing diverse challenges, (4) adapt to distinct institutional cultures, (5) be assertive with participants without seeming punitive, and (6) demonstrate self-direction. One grantee mentioned wanting staff who could gracefully accept failure and stay focused on their work if participants recidivated or dropped out of services.

Although an ideal candidate would have all of these qualifications, sites reported difficulty finding individuals with such a broad range of skills. As a result, some grantees compromised on workforce development or criminal justice experience, believing that field-specific knowledge was easier to learn on the job. Others prioritized skills differently according to the needs of the position; for example, they prioritized group facilitation skills for pre-release staff and prioritized case management and workforce experience for post-release staff.

HIRING AND ONBOARDING PROCESSES

The hiring and onboarding processes for jail-based AJC staff typically involved several steps and took from a few weeks to a few months. The main steps included:

Step 1: Develop job descriptions, recruit and screen candidates. In general, the organizations that employed the new staff created job descriptions and spearheaded the hiring process. Most organizations sought partners' input on job descriptions based on their areas of expertise and understanding of desired qualifications. Five of the seven sites hired internally for at least one direct service position. Two sites operated by workforce development agencies invited jails and/or other partners to participate in second-round interviews of candidates, which reportedly helped establish their buy-in to the hiring process and a sense of accountability to jail-based AJC staff.

Step 2: Conduct background checks. Although background checks were required for staff working in the jails in every site, the length of background checks varied significantly depending on jail policy and the level of security clearance required. Some staff received clearance within 48 hours, but others waited more than three months. Generally, staff given greater latitude to meet with participants and freedom of movement in the jail facility underwent more intensive screening.

Step 3: Train staff. The amount of training provided to staff ranged from less than eight hours to over 100 hours. In general, staff already employed by partners received less training than those newly hired. Training topics included:

- *Jail policies.* In every site, staff attended an orientation on jail policies and procedures that included a combination of safety, security procedures, getting approval for materials, dress code, chain of command, and jail staff roles.
- *Case management skills.* Staff in three of the seven sites received training in skills such as motivational interviewing, administering assessments, and social work concepts. Social work concepts included therapeutic relationship models for employment support, factors for criminological thinking, and approaches to working with an incarcerated population. One site used a specific curriculum, Thinking for Change (http://nicic.gov/t4c), which incorporates research from cognitive restructuring theory, social skills development, and the learning and use of problem-solving skills.
- *Workforce development systems.* Three sites provided training to help hired staff navigate the workforce system, such as describing the customer flow at the community-based AJCs and training on specific workforce curricula used at local AJCs.

STRATEGIES TO EXPEDITE HIRING

Although grants were announced in June, most grantees did not fully staff jail-based AJCs until at least December. Grantees reported that recruiting and hiring the right staff took longer than they expected, which ultimately affected some grantees' ability to meet their implementation schedules. Specifically, the following challenges affected hiring timelines: (1) grantees had a limited pool of job candidates who had the right combination of desired qualifications and were willing to work in a jail, especially in rural areas; (2) background checks further limited this pool by screening out some qualified candidates who were passionate about the work due to their personal experiences, such as having a criminal history or a close family member with a criminal history; (3) procedural requirements, such as background checks and the civil service hiring process, were time consuming; and (4) although grantees valued achieving consensus among key partners on hiring and selecting staff, scheduling meetings with multiple partners sometimes required additional time.

To help address these concerns, two important lessons emerged from LEAP grantees' early implementation experiences for expediting the hiring process.

- **Engage partners in hiring and leverage existing resources.** Engaging partners promoted a common understanding of the type of staff needed to provide services and helped lead agencies understand their partners' hiring processes. Effective practices included: (1) seeking information from partners about their staffing policies and hiring processes as early as possible to establish a realistic timeline and prevent unexpected delays; (2) working with high-level champions within partner agencies to "cut through red tape" and encourage human resource departments to prioritize hiring staff for the jail-based AJC; and (3) leveraging resources, such as job descriptions and training materials, from existing programs at partner agencies to accelerate the hiring process.
- **Keep staffing plans flexible.** Challenged to find qualified staff, current grantees often deviated from their planned hiring process to meet their goals. Strategies included: (1) adjusting staff roles to keep talented staff who could not pass jail security clearance (for example, one site restructured its staffing plan to allow one highly qualified staff member to work with participants only post-release); and (2) reallocating staff temporarily from existing programs to support the jail-based AJC when hiring took longer than expected.

Staffing configurations varied across the sites visited based on the structure of site partnerships, the strengths of partnering organizations, and available job candidates, as well as in response to unforeseen delays. While sites found that hiring for and staffing jail-based AJCs presented unique challenges and took longer than expected, they overcame these obstacles by engaging their partners and being flexible with their staffing plans.

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Other issue briefs in this series by Mathematica Policy Research and Social Policy Research Associates include:

- "Internet Access for Pre-Release Job Search Training" by Hannah Betesh.
- "Expediting the Launch of Service Provision" by Anne Paprocki.
- "Bridging Workforce Development and Corrections Cultures" by Heather Lewis-Charp.
- "Structuring Employment-Based Services Within Jail Spaces and Schedules" by Jennifer Henderson-Frakes.

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Case Management Models for Pre- and Post-Release Employment Services

Issue Brief 7 – Lessons from LEAP

Ivette Gutierrez, Social Policy Research Associates

May 2018

The LEAP grants sought to create a stronger linkage between pre- and post-release employment services for justice-involved individuals. Case management—coordinating services for and working directly with clients—is an important aspect of that linkage. In the LEAP sites, interactions with case managers played a role in shaping participants' experiences with employment services in the jail, and their engagement. This brief explores the different models used to deliver case management through jail-based AJCs and community-based AJCs and service providers, the benefits and drawbacks of those models, and strategies used to help establish continuity of services after release.

Study background

This issue brief series explores lessons from the evaluation of the Employment and Training Administration's Linking to Employment Activities Pre release (LEAP) grants, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Chief Evaluation Office. LEAP pilots the creation of jail based American Job Centers (AJCs) to support the successful reentry of participants and directly link them to community based AJCs upon release. The evaluation looks at approaches to providing services before and after incarceration across 20 sites based on site visits, phone interviews, focus groups, and grantee performance reports.

Key Findings

- Jail-based AJC staff were reported to drive the connection between jail-based and community-based services through the relationships they develop with participants while they are incarcerated.
- Linking participants to community-based case managers before release, either through informational meetings or through workshops, could help smooth the transition to community-based support after release.
- Regular channels of communication between jail-based and community-based staff could help community-based staff maintain the service plan established in the jail.

Case management in the jail-based AJC and community

Participants receiving services through the jail-based AJCs worked with case managers both in the jail and for up to one year after release. Although caseloads varied by site and over time within sites, staff reported that they worked with 6 to 40 participants before release, and 15 to 80 participants after release.

- On average, participants in jail-based AJCs met with a case manager every one to two weeks to receive individualized support and guidance on topics such as: participant goals, plans for pre-release services, addressing personal barriers to success, employment plans, impending release dates, and supportive services needed after release. Most sites provided other employment- and training-related services in group formats in addition to one-on-one counseling, although one site's service model relied entirely on individualized case management and job search assistance, with no group classes or workshops.
- After release, participants in most sites met with case managers every one to two weeks until they secured employment or enrolled in an educational program (unless they were in sober living housing). Some sites scheduled meetings on an as-needed basis. Community-based staff facilitated or referred participants to various career services, including job search, job placement, and occupational training. They also helped participants enroll in education, find housing and transportation, and obtain identification cards and other right-to-work documentation, although the extent to which they provided these supports varied.

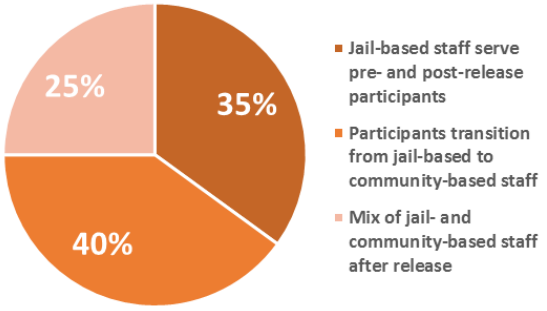
Staff and participants viewed case managers as the strongest influence upon participants' likelihood of success. They indicated that the most effective case managers treated participants in the jail-based AJCs as fellow "human beings" rather than as inmates, showed a profound level of personal caring and dedication to participants' success, and had dynamic, inspiring personalities that engaged participants and laid important groundwork for post-release contact and engagement. The human component was particularly valuable from the participants' perspective (see companion brief *An Opportunity for a Reset: The Experiences of Jail-Based American Job Center Customers Before and After Release*).

Case management models

To determine who would provide case management before and after release, the sites used one of three primary configurations (Figure 1):

1. **Jail-based staff serve participants both before and after release from jail.** Seven sites employed this model. Most either identified the days of the week on which staff would be in the jail-based AJC or the community and scheduled appointments accordingly, or reserved blocks of informal drop-in times, usually at a community AJC, for participants who had been released. Staff in one site did not have a regular schedule and adapted to the availability of their released participants.
2. **Participants transition from jail-based staff to community-based staff.** Eight sites linked participants after release to new, community-based staff for services. At the minimum, sites gave participants basic contact information for the new staff, but many introduced community-based staff to participants before release by bringing staff to visit the jail or holding virtual meetings.
3. **A mix of jail-based and community-based staff provide services after release.** Another staffing model emerged during implementation. Five sites had originally planned for the same staff to work with participants both before and after release, but as the caseload of released participants grew and other challenges emerged, they elected to expand their teams. In two sites, some team members divided their time between the jail and the community, while the remaining staff worked almost exclusively in the jail-based AJC. The other three sites supplemented their team with community-based AJC case managers. Case managers in these sites worked with participants before and after release to coordinate supportive services and keep them motivated and engaged. Participants were often also encouraged to work with community-based AJC case managers, who would provide or link them to career services available in the AJC.

Figure 1. Case management models across sites



Benefits and challenges of different models

Grantees chose a case management model based on their available resources, jail and community partners, and the capacity of contracted service providers. Each of the three models outlined above were reported to have limitations and benefits.

Relying on ***the same staff to provide both jail-based and community-based services*** appeared to have clear benefits; it eliminated the challenging handoff process from before to after release. Perhaps more importantly, the time invested in building quality relationships between staff and participants led to strong connections even after participants were released. Jail-based AJC staff had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with participants' personalities, needs, and barriers, as well as to understand the environment the participants would be returning to. They also had time to build the trust and rapport needed to quickly serve participants after release. One site described this model as "the most effective way." Another site used the transition from before to after release as an opportunity to transition participants from learning about career services to discussing their barriers to employment, leveraging the bond with staff to ease into an often difficult and sensitive subject area.

> *"That's one thing that I do like about them, we're in here interacting with them, they know about us, our background, what we want to do. Instead of having to explain to them all over again what we like to do."*
>
> - Participant

Sites that used this staffing model reported more success than other sites in quickly contacting and serving participants after release. Staff in these sites collected phone and address information of family and friends (with a focus on a relatively stable family member), and then used this information if they could not reach the participant after release. Although sites with different pre- and post-release staff could have used this approach, they did not report collecting this information and staff in those sites often reported difficulties in contacting participants after release.

However, sites also relayed some challenges with using jail-based staff to provide post-release services. Staff caseloads continued to grow indefinitely, and they had to coordinate schedules with three distinct populations: (1) participants in jail without an imminent release date, (2) those nearing release, and (3) those who had been released. One site managed this issue by "ween[ing participants] off the support gradually." The staff met with recently released participants weekly and eventually transitioned them to less frequent meetings. Four of the seven sites reported that staff turnover was also a substantial challenge for this model because a staff member's departure affected both jail and community-based services, and the background checks required to hire new staff to work in a jail can take months. In addition, this model could hinder participants' access to a fuller array of community AJC services. Case managers often felt they knew participants best and were reluctant to refer them to other staff in the community AJC, who did not specialize in serving reentering individuals but might have had access to other community resources.

The case management model of using ***separate jail-based and community-based staff*** had different benefits and challenges. Participants who were transitioned to community-based staff encountered a team dedicated to serving only released participants, and sites were able to hire staff with more specialized skills for each role (see study brief *Staffing Jail-Based American Job Centers* for more information on staff qualifications). Staff were more flexible about when and where they met participants, and they could more easily coordinate schedules with probation officers for participants on formal supervision. On the other hand, staff at sites that used this model found that they needed to make a substantial effort to build relationships with participants; indeed, it was often difficult even to make an initial contact with participants, since participants did not recognize or have relationships yet with the community-based staff. Furthermore, rapidly changing release dates added a layer of complexity to this connection process—community-based staff were often surprised by unexpected releases. One site relied on participants to initiate contact with community-based staff, since staff did not have enough notification to schedule appointments before release. Another site made sure that participants had contact information for post-release staff, "because they might be gone before the planned release date."

Sites using the third model, with ***a mix of staff serving participants after release***, experienced some of the benefits outlined above, such as leveraging trust between staff and participants built in jails, but also faced the challenge of balancing caseloads. In one site, staff working only in the community had smaller caseloads than staff serving both jailed and released participants, overburdening some staff while underutilizing others. However, this model's staffing flexibility was reported to promote more collaboration between grant leadership, partners, and direct-service staff, since staff who worked in both locations moved between the jail and community frequently and interacted with different teams. Although one site noted that communication between teams was a challenge, in general, sites found they could adjust their staffing easily to meet participant and program demands.

Strategies for aligning services

Sites' efforts to create strong case management models that would help align jail-based and community-based services generated the following promising strategies:

- **Introduce community-based staff to participants before release.** A majority of the sites where participants worked with different case managers before and after release created opportunities for community-based staff to meet or get to know participants before release. Some brought community-based staff to the jail-based AJC to meet

with participants in a group or one-on-one setting to discuss post-release services and participant needs. One site arranged to have community-based staff stand in for jail-based staff as needed. Visiting staff often administered specific services, such as individual assessments and registration for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act career services or training. In one site, staff held mock interviews to build rapport with participants. Sites that did not bring community-based staff to the jail used other strategies, including introductions via Skype or recorded video presentations.

- **Facilitate regular staff collaboration to increase communication about participants' needs and progress.** Sites that used the same staff to serve participants before and after release often reported that they relied on individual employment plans developed while participants were in jail to anchor the first post-release meeting. But in sites where different staff served participants, knowledge transfer was a challenge. To increase the alignment of services, a few sites had weekly or monthly staff meetings that included jail-based and community-based staff and partners to discuss participants' progress and needs. Some sites used these meetings to decide which participants would receive additional intensive services. Other sites had informal check-ins for staff to discuss participants' cases. These types of regular meetings seemed to facilitate following the service plan established in the jail, and provided avenues for feedback so that staff in the jail and community could make course corrections to services as needed. In one site, jail-based staff lamented that community-based staff did not communicate with them about participants and, as a result, they could not assess whether the services they provided in the jail were beneficial for participants.
- **Use a common Management Information System (MIS) to improve the transfer of information between jail-based AJC and community-based staff**. Sites that had one MIS accessible in real-time to staff serving both pre- and post-release participants reported having better access to information about participants and the services and support they needed upon release. One of the sites described their MIS as the main method of communication between staff about participants. Sites that used different systems for tracking pre- and post-release data reported difficulty accessing information necessary for engaging and serving participants after release. Even sites that used one MIS for both pre- and post-release staff but did not have real-time updates (i.e. jail-based AJC staff had to leave the jail to update the MIS) reported gaps in critical case notes and contact information for follow-up (see companion brief, *Tracking Participant Data for Reentry*, for more information about grantee MIS use).

Conclusion

Grantees implemented a variety of approaches to coordinating services across the jail and community contexts for justice-involved individuals, but staff members' experiences suggest that some strategies can help align services to assist participants in finding the support they need to succeed. These include creating opportunities for community-based staff to get to know participants before release, and making sure staff in the jail and community communicate effectively and in a timely way about participants and services.

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Providing Services in a Jail-Based American Job Center

Issue Brief 8 – Lessons from LEAP

Jennifer Henderson-Frakes, Social Policy Research Associates

May 2018

For inmates transitioning back to the community, pre-release employment and related services have the potential to foster post-release success. The LEAP grants established AJCs inside jail facilities and enrolled 3,110 participants between August 2015 and June 2017. The U.S. Department of Labor required that pre-release AJC activities for these participants "include all required [Workforce Investment Act] core and intensive services for participants," including but not limited to comprehensive case management; job-seeking services; and assistance with education or training.[1] The jail-based AJCs also provided participants with a needs assessment and career planning services, which often included assessments not typically administered in a community-based AJC. This brief discusses how jail-based AJC staff assessed inmates' needs and goals, prepared employment and service plans, and delivered services to address participants' barriers before their transition to the community and the workforce.

Study background

This issue brief series explores lessons from the evaluation of the Employment and Training Administration's Linking to Employment Activities Pre release (LEAP) grants, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Chief Evaluation Office. LEAP pilots the creation of jail based American Job Centers (AJCs) to support the successful reentry of participants and directly link them to community based AJCs upon release. The evaluation looks at approaches to providing services before and after incarceration across 20 sites based on site visits, phone interviews, focus groups, and grantee performance reports.

Key Findings

- Jail-based AJC services addressed diverse but interrelated aspects of both job and life skills.
- Work readiness training, workforce information services, and career/life skills counseling were the most common pre-release services.
- Participants valued opportunities to gain marketable skills, such as Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) certification, and to obtain supportive services, such as assistance getting official identification.
- Staff felt that refresher activities just before release for participants who had completed pre-release programming with time left in jail could boost participants' chances for post-release success.

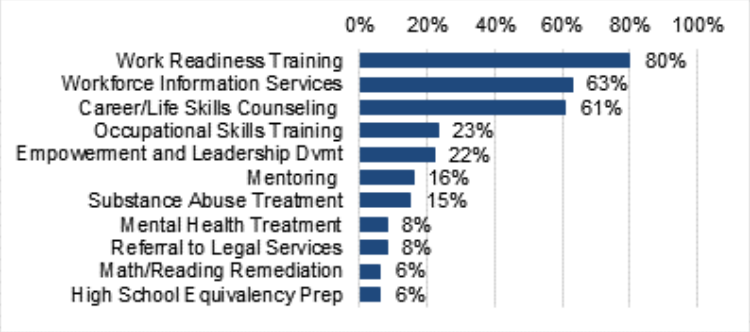
Prior to LEAP, the participating jails sometimes had no or very few services available to prepare returning citizens for gainful employment and other positive life outcomes. Even in facilities where inmates had access to job-related training or work experience, the jail-based AJCs added comprehensive services to address personal and structural barriers to success, as well as a support system aimed to create a continuity of services after participants were released.

Individual service planning

Sites used individual service plans to document participants' backgrounds and goals—particularly career goals—as well as action steps, supportive service needs, personal goals, and educational and employment histories. Pre-release case managers typically developed individual plans during one-on-one time with participants, eventually sharing the plans with post-release staff such as job developers and employment specialists. However, in at least two sites, the plan was not created until just before release or when participants were in the community.

Sites used both traditional AJC assessments and corrections-specific assessments to help inform individual service plans. Traditional assessments included educational, career interest, job-readiness, and mental and physical health assessments for understanding participants' interests, skills, and needs. Corrections-specific assessments were usually a type of criminogenic risk assessment to determine participants' initial eligibility for jail-based AJC services. The most commonly mentioned assessments were the Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions risk assessment, the Level of Service/Case Management Inventory, and the Test of Adult Basic Education. Generally, jail-based AJC staff administered the assessments unless correctional facility staff had already administered them to inmates. In two sites, results from an assessment served as the individual plan, such as one site's pre-work readiness assessment.

Figure 1. Share of participants who received selected services before release



Source: LEAP grantee performance reports as of June 30, 2017, except for one site that reported as of December 31, 2016. While reports include the percentage of participants that ever received each type of service, some grantees appear to have reported multiple instances of the same participant receiving services. As a result, statistics in this graph should be considered an upper bound.

Although all sites assessed participants, individual plans were not often used to customize pre-release services for each individual, as would normally occur in a community-based AJC. This was likely due to the limitations of scheduling and service offerings in the jail-based AJC. One site did use individual plans to determine whether to enroll participants in remediation or job readiness. More often, the jail-based staff used the plans to guide one-on-one counseling, and the assessments and plans were shared with staff serving participants after release (see companion brief, *Post-Release Engagement and Services*).

Job-preparation and training services

Job preparation was at the heart of jail-based AJC services. Grantees reported work-readiness activities as the most common pre-release service, with an estimated 80 percent of participants receiving them (Figure 1). Inside the jail, participants engaged in job-preparation services for anywhere from two weeks to three months, with six to eight weeks being the most commonly reported time frame.

Job-preparation services were usually delivered through group classes. Depending on the length of pre-release programming, job-related classes could occur daily or one or two times per week. Classes were often paired with access to a computer (to work on resumes, for example) and case management meetings to provide individualized support. Outside of these classes, participants in some facilities could access other non-LEAP-funded employment-related services, such as work release or computer literacy offered by the jail.

Some sites noted the need to adapt class content given variation in education levels, though there generally was little customization. In one site, if participants were very close to their release date, jail-based AJC staff reported foregoing classes and relying exclusively on individualized case management and job search assistance.

Job-preparation classes were broad in scope, covering both job and life skills. Job-related topics covered the full range typically covered in a community AJC, including job search, job applications, resumes and cover letters, and interviewing techniques. Classes also commonly covered workplace etiquette (such as dress code and co-worker interactions) and communication (including email and phone etiquette and, less commonly, maintaining an appropriate social media presence).

Sites also recognized the unique personal, financial, and emotional barriers to employment success that justice-

involved individuals face, and delivered instruction on strategies such as time management, organizational and decision-making skills, financial literacy, and anger management. The curriculum used most often with participants or as a resource for training staff (in 8 of 20 sites) was *Thinking for a Change,* an integrated, cognitive behavioral change program designed for justice-involved individuals. Two sites required participation in classes that addressed individual barriers before job-readiness classes. For example, one site required participants to complete a reentry action planning class that focused on addressing cognitive and emotional barriers before beginning the classes that concentrated solely on job readiness.

Opportunities for occupational training and certification were less common but strongly valued by participants when available. Nearly one-quarter of jail-based AJC participants received vocational or occupational skills training (Figure 1; 23 percent or 725 participants as of July 1, 2017). Training opportunities were sometimes available through the jail's laundry and print shop, or through other jail vocational programs such as culinary arts, landscaping, and industrial mechanics. Staff in six sites indicated that opportunities to certify for OSHA, ServSafe Food Handler, hazardous material remediation, National Retail Federation, and National Career Readiness Assessment were available to participants in the jail-based AJC.[2] OSHA and other certifications were sometimes already offered through the jail, and LEAP sites took advantage of those existing resources. Participants particularly valued these trainings because they provided nationally recognized credentials that demonstrated to employer a commitment to learning, and boosted participants' confidence while in jail. Staff at one site described certification as a prized feature of their pre-release services.

Nearly one-quarter (725) of jail-based AJC participants received vocational or occupational skills training

Some sites developed occupational skills training programs for their jail-based AJC participants when not available through the jail. One site successfully encouraged a community college to deliver training courses in customer service and OSHA with associated credentials in the jail. The college offered the courses in conjunction with soft-skills classes provided by jail-based AJC staff. Another site encouraged a community college partner to design and offer a web-based, six-week industrial mechanics course with associated OSHA general safety and construction credentials at the jail using portable equipment.

Career and life skills counseling

Of all pre-release services, one-on-one counseling or case management offered the strongest opportunity for both forging personal connections and tailoring plans and services to individual goals, interests, education, and work history. Such counseling typically occurred during classes or during one-on-one meetings with participants. Grantee performance reports indicated that 61 percent of participants received some form of career or life skills counseling (Figure 1). See the companion brief, *Case Management Models for Providing Pre- and Post-Release Employment Services,* for more detail on the content, frequency, and structure of case management across sites.

Support and other services

In addition to workforce preparation and training services, participants could receive other supports from jail-based AJC staff or from existing service providers at the jail, including leadership development, mentoring, substance abuse and mental health treatment, legal services and referrals, parenting classes, social service and benefits enrollment, and assistance with obtaining official personal identification. Although helping obtain identification proved challenging for some sites, at least one site had particular success in helping participants acquire a valid ID in the form of an occupational limited driver's license, which was less expensive than a traditional driver's license and enabled participants to travel to interviews and jobs.

Potentially promising practices

Data from participants and staff suggest that certain practices hold promise for jail-based AJC programming:

Peer interaction may boost learning. Jail-based AJC staff indicated that integrating peer interaction, sharing,

and problem-solving into class time helped boost participants' engagement and learning. One site changed its pre-release curriculum to allow participants to move around and share with peers, and another valued enabling participants to share strategies with one another during class.

Celebrating success appears to benefit both participants and programs. Three sites provided participants with a certificate of pre-release programming completion and/or with a graduation ceremony. In one site, local media covered the event in which high-level city officials attended, participants received certificates, and a celebratory cake was part of the festivities. Staff viewed this ceremony as giving visibility to jail-based AJC programming and providing participants an opportunity to have their achievements recognized and voices heard.

Employers can play an important role in pre-release services. At two sites with a focus on employer engagement, employers visited the facility to conduct mock interview sessions with pre-release participants. Employers also helped pre-release participants in one of these sites with their resumes. Three additional sites worked with employers to secure work release opportunities for inmates. Of these three sites, one invited employers to speak with inmates at the jail about employment opportunities. Another site reported partnering with an employer to offer a culinary training program at the jail.

Refresher activities just before release may improve participants' chances for success. Because release dates are uncertain, some participants completed jail-based AJC services with time remaining before release. One site made refresher courses available for participants because the participants they perceived as most successful tended to complete classes within one week of release. Another site allowed participants with time remaining in jail to engage in post-graduation activities, such as practicing interviewing skills with a career specialist.

Conclusion

Pre-release employment services aim to help participants focus on goals and plans for self-improvement while also paving the way for positive employment and life outcomes after release. Sites provided a variety of services in the jail that you might typically find at a community-based AJC—including work readiness training, highly valued occupational skills training, and supportive services. However, jail-based AJC staff reported that addressing the unique barriers of justice-involved individuals through the content of workshops and counseling and providing a support system for participants to receive continuity of services upon release were important ingredients for motivating individuals to persist and succeed.

Endnotes

1 Per FOA-ETA-15-03, Linking to Employment Activities Pre-release Specialized American Job Centers (AJCs), U.S. Department of Labor, ETA.

2 Some certifications participants could complete in the jail-based AJC did not meet the definition of a recognized postsecondary credential as defined for the WIOA Credential Attainment performance indicator in ETA guidance.

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- "Case Management Models for Pre- and Post-Release Employment Services" by Ivette Gutierrez
- "Data Management for Pre- and Post-Release Workforce Services" by Jillian Stein
- "Engaging Participants in Workforce Services after Release from Jail" by Samina Sattar

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Engaging Participants in Workforce Services after Release from Jail

Issue Brief 9 – Lessons from LEAP

Samina Sattar, Mathematica Policy Research

May 2018

Reentering the community is a challenging transition for justice-involved individuals who often face numerous barriers in restarting their lives outside of jail. It is similarly challenging for service providers who aid them during this transition—recently released individuals become difficult to contact once outside, are spread over a larger geographic area, and face competing demands on their time. This brief presents lessons on engaging individuals after release from incarceration, drawn from the experiences of workforce and corrections agencies that established AJCs in jails to serve individuals and link them after release to community-based services.

Study background

This issue brief series explores lessons from the evaluation of the Employment and Training Administration's Linking to Employment Activities Pre release (LEAP) grants, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Chief Evaluation Office. LEAP pilots the creation of jail-based American Job Centers (AJCs) to support the successful reentry of participants and directly link them to community based AJCs upon release. The evaluation looks at approaches to providing services before and after incarceration across 20 sites based on site visits, phone interviews, focus groups, and grantee performance reports.

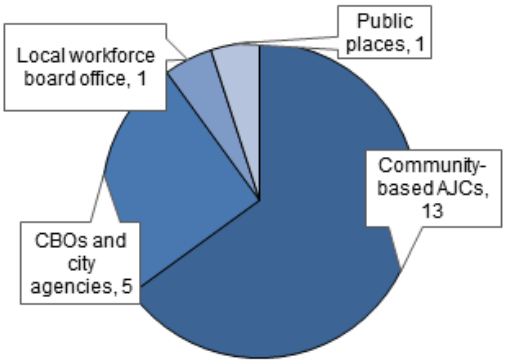
Key Findings

- To increase participant engagement after release, sites focused on developing strong relationships with participants during incarceration, communicating clearly about the transition to the community, and providing supportive services.
- Staff prioritized addressing barriers—such as unstable housing, lack of transportation, and history of substance abuse– that prevented participants from showing up for appointments after returning to the community.
- Staff who primarily served reentering individuals reported providing more intensive case management, more support for wraparound services, and more financial incentives than staff who served all AJC customers.

Where were reentering individuals served?

Deciding where and how to serve participants is a key part of designing post-release services. Of the 20 LEAP sites, 13 served individuals after release primarily in a local community-based AJC, usually the one serving the geographic area in which the jail was located (Figure 1). In 5 sites, participants met with staff at participating community-based organizations (CBOs) and, in one case, a city agency. In another site, a post-release case manager met with participants at the local workforce board office. In the final site, the pre-release case manager met with participants in public places that were convenient for participants. Staff in both of the latter two sites reported that meeting outside of the community AJC was useful for connecting with participants who could not easily travel to the community AJC; and gave staff more flexibility in the times of day they could meet with participants one-on-one.

Figure 1. Where participants were primarily served



How difficult was it for staff to engage participants outside of jail?

Sites had varying success in reaching individuals who were released from the jail facility and engaging them in continued services. As of July 1, 2017, 3,327 individuals had been enrolled in jail-based AJC services and 2,532 of those participants had been released from jail. Of those released, 62 percent (1,572 participants) had been out of jail for at least 30 days and had not yet found employment or enrolled in education.[1] The post-release enrollment rate in community-based services, which was calculated as the percentage of these individuals who enrolled in career services within their first month out of jail, was 68 percent (1,062 participants).[2] The post-release enrollment rate varied from 13 to 100 percent across sites.

During discharge planning, ideally conducted while the participant was still in jail, staff discussed housing, transportation, the location of the community AJC, and how to reach case managers after release. However, case managers in a few sites reported that the volatility of release dates or a lack of coordination with jail administrators often affected their ability to engage participants immediately upon release. In particular, participants were often released without advance notice, making it hard to discuss discharge plans with participants before they were released.

Other factors also influenced whether participants reconnected (and stayed connected) with workforce services after release, though a few of these factors were more challenging for some sites than others:

- **Lack of interest in further services.** Staff noted that many participants had financial obligations—including housing, food, unpaid court fees, and back payments on child support—that required them to find immediate employment rather than attend further training or education services. Many also felt pressure to find any job as soon as possible rather than look for a job with opportunities for advancement. Staff also felt that some participants were skeptical that case managers could help find them a job quickly and, as a result, were less likely to engage after release.
- **Unstable housing situation.** Grantee performance reports show that 28 percent of participants being released from jail were either at risk of displacement from their post-release residence or expected to be homeless. Staff noted that those with unstable housing were more difficult to locate and less likely to show up for service appointments, job interviews, and work. Some sites reported severe shortages of affordable housing in their region.
- **Transportation barriers.** Many participants did not have access to a car, could not afford to reinstate their driver's license, or could not afford public transportation to the AJC. Some participants also relocated far from the jail, making it harder to travel to the community AJC or provider locations where staff familiar with LEAP were located. Staff in some sites did try to connect participants to case managers in other AJCs, but it was unclear whether staff in all sites did this. A few sites noted that the public transportation infrastructure in their area was particularly weak, which made it more difficult for participants to travel to the community AJC.
- **History of substance abuse.** Grantee performance reports show that 48 percent of enrolled participants had a history of drug or alcohol abuse. Staff reported that many entered sober-living housing or rehab after release from jail. Some of these programs had restrictions on residents' ability to leave the facility, which meant that AJC or provider staff could not work with them for an extended period.

How did staff encourage participants to connect to services after release?

Staff highlighted two key components of engaging participants: forming solid relationships with participants in the jail, and connecting with participants as soon as possible after release. Several respondents noted that a strong staff bond with a participant in the jail was a reliable predictor of post-release engagement. (A companion brief, *An Opportunity for a Reset*, discusses why the personal relationship was important for participants.) Case managers also noted that connecting immediately upon release was the best strategy to ensure engagement. As one staff person noted, "The sooner we get them engaged, the more successful they are. The longer they take to follow up, the less likely they are to be successful." Most staff recommended having at least some type of contact within the first week of release, though staff in one site felt that participants sometimes need more time to settle into

their new surroundings before they are willing and able to engage in services.

Staff were creative about getting in touch with participants, looking for them on social media, in halfway houses, or driving around town. Staff in Brunswick, Maine, eventually decided to meet participants on the day of their release outside the jail, which staff reported made a big difference because "not a lot of people have someone waiting outside for them." Staff also recommended establishing a specific day of the week when a staff member was available in the AJC to meet with participants. Figure 2 describes how the LEAP team in New Haven, Connecticut, which reported 80 percent post-release enrollment, approached the transition.

Figure 2. Preparing for release in New Haven, Connecticut

LEAP staff in New Haven outlined their approach to connecting services in the jail to the community, which included interaction with a post-release case manager and targeted reentry planning:

Step 1. Post-release staff visit the jail to introduce themselves to participants, provide their business cards, talk about services available after release, and photocopy participant case files.

Step 2. A pre-release coordinator checks in with participants every day leading up to release to explore pick-up and transportation needs. The coordinator also helps participants apply for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits before release so that SNAP electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards are waiting for them when they return home.

Step 3. After release, staff connect with participants within 48 hours to discuss next steps. If participants do not have transportation, staff might meet them at the gate of the jail upon release. Staff also use an Uber business account to pick up and drop off participants as needed to counseling or job interviews.

Sites tried a number of other approaches, both inside and outside the jail, to encourage participants to connect to services in the community after release, despite the many barriers they faced. Figure 3 on the next page highlights some strategies that sites noted were particularly important to encourage continued participation. On the inside, staff worked to build participant engagement, align jail-based AJC services with community AJC services, and prepare participants for a smooth transition to the community. On the outside, staff worked to connect to participants as soon as possible and remove personal barriers to job search.

What services did staff provide after release?

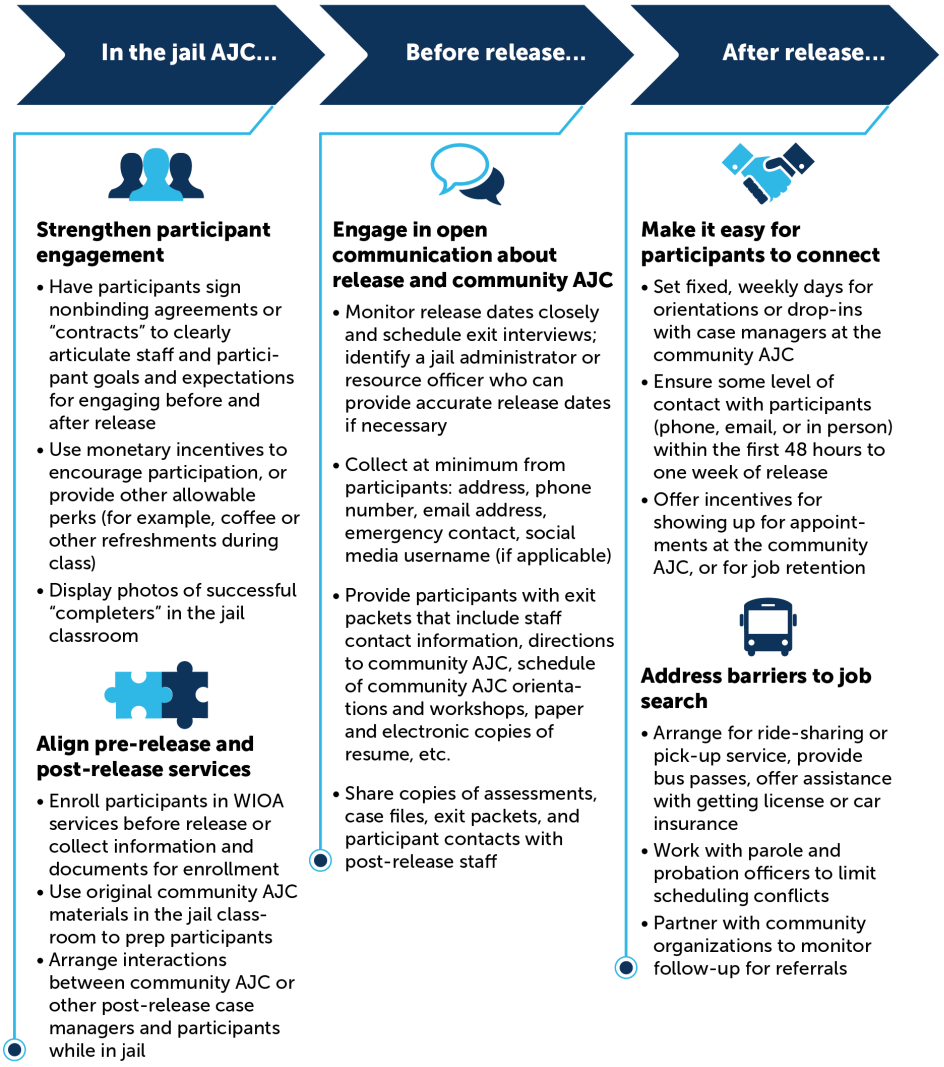
In the 13 sites where participants were primarily served in a community AJC, they had access to the same services as a typical AJC customer. Case managers conducted intake and assessment; registered participants in the state jobs database; and directed them to available resources at the AJC such as labor market information, job search and job readiness workshops, GED classes, work experience, and placement. The extent to which participants received additional services tailored to reentry depended on the resources already available in the AJC for reentering individuals, as well as whether sites chose to have participants interact with staff who primarily worked with reentering individuals. (The companion brief, *Case Management Models in Jail-Based American Job Centers*, includes more information on different approaches to staffing across sites.) In one site, participants attended an existing weekly job club for reentering individuals, received a resource guide for reentry-focused services, could receive specialized mentoring, and had access to a monthly reentry-specific resource fair that both service providers and employers attended. Grantees were not required to report data for all post-release services provided to participants, but did report on support services (Figure 4 on page 5) that were typically provided after release (except for parenting classes, which were sometimes offered pre-release), according to interviews with case managers.

Case managers who worked with the general community of AJC customers (and who provided post-release services in four sites) were less likely to have experience working with reentering individuals, and tended to outsource most of the wraparound services that participants might need, such as transportation assistance and referrals to housing, health care, substance abuse treatment, child care, assistance obtaining identification, and other supportive services. However, these case managers were also more likely to coenroll participants in WIOA

than in other sites. Staff interviews suggest that five sites coenrolled all or most participants in WIOA, although grantee performance data did not include the specific proportion who received services through WIOA or other funding.

In six sites, participants met with the same case managers from the jail-based AJC after release, and in three sites, they met with staff who worked primarily with reentering individuals. Staff in these nine sites reported that participants received more intensive case management than the typical AJC customer. Staff reported spending more one-on-one time with participants, sometimes adapting workshop content to a one-on-one session if participants were hesitant to attend a group workshop where they might have to mention their recent incarceration. These staff also focused on addressing barriers to job search and work, such as transportation, obtaining identification and other documentation, enrolling in counseling for substance abuse, and finding stable housing. In one site, staff connected participants with a local church for community service activities and mentoring while they waited for their documentation to be processed. Staff also accompanied participants to job interviews when necessary, and contacted employers who were open to hiring individuals with justice involvement. Participants in these sites were less likely to be coenrolled with WIOA, but some staff did report enrolling participants in WIOA services to take advantage of funding for on-the-job-training and tuition assistance on a case-by-case basis.

Figure 3. Examples of strategies used inside and outside the jail to encourage post-release participation



Source: Site visits and phone discussions with LEAP staff.

Of the seven sites where participants were primarily served outside of the community AJC, participants met with staff from a CBO (6 sites) or the workforce board (1 site). These organizations or their staff specialized in serving the reentering population and could provide the services typically available in an AJC but geared them toward recently released individuals. Most of the CBOs also offered more in-house wraparound services, such as legal

Figure 4. Support services received

Service type	Sites where at least one participant received service	Average % of participants who received service*
Transportation services	14	39
Housing assistance/referral	13	18
Follow-up occupational skills training	12	11
Follow-up mentoring	8	13
Needs-related payments	7	24
Follow-up high school equivalency prep	6	4
Parenting classes	6	13
Family reunification assistance	5	5
Referral for domestic abuse treatment	3	1

Source: LEAP grantee performance reports for 19 sites as of July 1, 2017, and for one site as of January 1, 2017. Although data are intended to indicate the percentage of participants who ever received each type of service, some grantees likely reported multiple instances of the same participant receiving services. As a result, statistics in this table should be considered an upper bound.

* Percentage calculated out of total participants released from jail; average based on sites where at least one participant received service.

support, substance abuse and mental health counseling, housing assistance, life skills classes, and family reunification services. Staff were sometimes trained in behavioral therapy and trauma-informed care, had extensive contacts with employers who hired formerly incarcerated individuals, and reported placing participants directly into certification programs that would accept individuals with a criminal record, such as forklift training, welding or shipyard certification, and commercial driver license training. These sites were also more likely to offer financial incentives for participation, such as showing up for appointments at the CBO office (see next section). In four of the seven sites, participants were also encouraged to visit the community AJC and work with a case manager there, particularly if they were eligible for and could benefit from WIOA services.

How did sites keep participants engaged?

A common challenge across sites was keeping participants continuously engaged in services after release. Staff noted that as participants return to their communities, they face financial struggles and are susceptible to influences and behaviors that can undermine their success. Using LEAP grant funds, many sites provided participants with supports that were not available to other AJC customers and were particularly crucial for individuals released from jail. For example, 8 sites subsidized or covered fees for acquiring identification; 14 sites provided bus passes or paid for other forms of travel; and 13 sites paid for work clothing and supplies. Staff reported that these supports were important for keeping participants engaged and connected to their job search or employment, especially in the early period after release.

Figure 5. Post-release incentives in Ventura, California

Participants in Ventura could receive a number of incentives tied to their participation:

- **$50** for receiving the completion certificate in jail (payable upon release)
- **$50** for attending the initial post-release meeting at the community AJC
- **$100** for obtaining a job (with a pay stub as proof of part-time or full-time employment)
- **$100** for maintaining employment for more than 90 days

Six sites went beyond these supports and offered cash incentives or gift cards for participating in services or reaching milestones. The site in Ventura, California, offered a menu of incentives (Figure 5), while other sites offered one or two. For example, the site in West Palm Beach, Florida, rewarded participants for showing up at their first community AJC appointment, and the site in Utica, New York, rewarded 90 days of job retention.

Conclusion

Each individual who reenters the community after incarceration has a unique set of challenges to becoming self-sufficient. However, the experiences of the LEAP grantees suggest a number of ways that workforce and corrections agencies and their partners can design service delivery to keep individuals engaged with workforce services and help them succeed. These strategies start in the jail with building trust, continue during the transition to the community through communicating effectively about reentry as the individual's release date approaches, and are solidified outside of jail in the form of immediate and comprehensive support from case managers for

released individuals. Post-release services that (1) address and remove the barriers that recently incarcerated individuals face and (2) include targeted incentives to motivate participants for success show promise in aiding justice-involved individuals in achieving self-sufficiency.

Endnotes

[1] Data are not available on whether the remaining 38 percent of participants who were released from jail were still in their first 30 days after release, had entered employment, and/or were enrolled in education. The final report for the study will look at post-release enrollment rates for an updated sample of LEAP participants.

[2] Post-release enrollment rate is defined as the percentage of participants who report for and are enrolled in comprehensive career services within 30 days after release. Participants who enter employment or education within 30 days of release without enrolling in career services are excluded from this measure. One site did not report a post-enrollment rate because all participants eligible for the measure had entered employment or education.

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"An Opportunity for a Reset": The Experiences of Jail-Based American Job Center Customers Before and After Release

Issue Brief 10 – Lessons from LEAP

Alix Gould-Werth, Mathematica Policy Research

May 2018

In 2015, 20 LEAP grantees across the country began developing and operating jail-based AJCs. The jail-based AJCs they set up aim to break the cycle of recidivism by linking participants to work and the workforce system early, before and immediately upon participant re-entry into the community. Preparation for employment and assistance with the job-search process were the core of jail-based AJC services, but according to participants, offerings went "way beyond resumes and interviews." Participants described an array of assistance, including help reframing their thinking, access to supportive services, and comprehensive case management. This brief describes participants' experiences, their impressions of the staff they encountered, and their suggestions for improvement, based on data from 18 pre-release and 9 post-release focus groups. Of the 3,110 LEAP participants enrolled as of June 2017, 104 attended the focus groups.

Study background

This issue brief series explores lessons from the evaluation of the Employment and Training Administration's Linking to Employment Activities Pre release (LEAP) grants, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Chief Evaluation Office. LEAP pilots the creation of jail based American Job Centers (AJCs) to support the successful reentry of participants and directly link them to community based AJCs upon release. The evaluation looks at approaches to providing services before and after incarceration across 20 sites based on site visits, phone interviews, focus groups, and grantee performance reports.

Key Findings

- Participants valued job-search preparation and assistance, instruction in cognitive-behavioral change, and supportive services such as help obtaining identification cards and transportation.
- Participants "felt human" in the jail-based AJCs, primarily because of their interactions with staff.
- Participants overwhelmingly reported strong, positive relationships with AJC staff, though in some sites they reported staff members were stretched thin.
- Participants requested more occupation-specific skill training and better coordination between jail- and community-based AJC staff and corrections staff to facilitate participation in post-release services and employment.

"We come here to prepare to find employment": Participants valued job-search preparation and assistance

When reflecting on the most useful AJC services, focus group participants often mentioned guidance that enhanced their job-search skills or helped with the job-search process: help preparing resumes (and cover letters, job applications, and thank you notes), developing interviewing skills, identifying career interests, learning about the local labor market, and searching for work. Participants who had never received such instruction expressed particular enthusiasm: "It's great—I never knew how to be interviewed," said one post-release participant. "It was really my first time and I was kind of excited about getting my first resume done," said another. Several said that guidance on when and how to appropriately discuss their conviction history was especially helpful.

Due to their varied levels of experience with job search activities, a few participants reported dissatisfaction with job-search preparation and assistance activities. In some sites, pre-release participants said they were already familiar with the content, while in other sites, participants thought that more class time should be devoted to these

core skills. After their release, several participants also expressed frustration that despite having developed job-search skills, they could not find work. "People won't give me the opportunity," remarked a post-release job seeker, concerned that he would continue to be rejected from jobs because of his criminal record.

Who were the jail-based AJC participants?

Participants in LEAP-funded AJC services were adults 18 years of age and older who had been sentenced and were within 180 days of their release date, and who had not been convicted of a sexual offense other than prostitution. Most (85 percent) were male, according to administrative data. About a quarter had not completed high school (27 percent); some (21 percent) had attended college or a technical or vocational school full-time. Participants were of all racial and ethnic backgrounds: 55 percent identified as white, 32 percent as black, and 19 percent as Latino. Participants were incarcerated on charges that included property crimes, drug crimes, and public order offenses. This brief draws on the perspectives of 104 participants invited by staff members to voluntarily attend focus groups; as a result, this group may have been more engaged with services than the average participant.

"All I need so I can keep on going": Participants said supportive services were key components

Before and after release, participants across sites reported receiving help securing identification, health and mental health services, transportation, public benefits, and housing in the community. "While the program focused on employment," one participant noted before release, "it has also provided help and services well beyond those which relate to employment."

Some participants considered supportive services a necessary precursor to securing or keeping a job. "I don't know what's going to happen… about me having housing," said one participant before his release, "but I'm hoping that [the staff] tells me 'you know what, we got a bed for you.' And that's all I need so I can keep on going." After release, a participant explained that without supportive services, she would not have been able to work. Her driver's license was suspended as part of her sentence, but she needed it to commute to her job and AJC staff helped her to reinstate it. Participants repeatedly said the help AJC staff provided to secure driver's licenses, social security cards, and other forms of identification (before and after release) was one of the most helpful AJC services. Indeed, one focus group came to the consensus that the range of social service assistance was as beneficial as help with resumes or interviewing. "Social service help was big," a participant remarked, "That stuff takes forever. Our food stamp cards were waiting for us when we got out." With other needs dealt with, they could devote more energy to searching for work.

"Brushing up on believing in myself": AJC services helped participants change their frames of mind

Several AJCs used curricula designed to enhance cognitive-behavioral skills, such as *Thinking for A Change*. Regardless of curriculum, participants across sites commented that what they learned changed their mindsets.

Cognitive-behavioral change. Participants repeatedly stressed that AJC services helped them to see themselves as potential employees and to change their thinking in a broader sense. "[It helps us] stay out of the prison thinking process," said one participant before release. Participants placed high value on the skills they developed for managing stress, making better decisions, and controlling their emotions—skills they said would help them stay employed. A pre-release participant described a self-paced computer program he used in the AJC: it presented workplace scenarios that he used to practice handling workplace conflict. The program, he said, helped him "think beyond the [jail] walls."

"I looked good in a suit and tie."

A pre-release participant describes wearing business attire for the first time as part of a mock interview

"He talks to us like humans." Several participants commented on the significance of being treated as AJC customers rather than as inmates. Many reported feeling "human" or being treated as "a person" in the AJCs. One pre-release participant noted that staff members "don't look at us any different even though we are in jail. They just look at us like another person looking for help."

"***Confidence that I can get a job."*** AJC programming "gave me the confidence that I can get a job with my record." This refrain was echoed across focus groups. A pre-release participant who had never been employed described developing a sense of his own skills:

> *[An AJC staff member] asked me, 'So, what do you like to do?' [I responded] 'I like to cook; I like to cut hair.' She said, 'Have you ever cooked anywhere?' [In jail] I was in the kitchen. I was the prep cook, the cook, the chopper, dishwasher. She said, 'Look, see you got skills right there you just didn't know it.' So she ….did my resume, and I was a prep cook, washer, and server. I never knew I had those skills 'til she helped me open up and dissect what I have.*

A post-release participant with extensive work experience also appreciated the confidence boost: "[the AJC] helped me gain a little bit of confidence [to go] directly from jail into the workforce. [It] helped me with skills that I needed to do an interview, or even proper attire, and basic stuff like shaking their hand, or eye contact."

"I ran into some good people": Participants described strong relationships with caring staff

Participants held staff in high regard. When describing staff, participants used phrases like "dream maker"; "efficient, responsive, and real"; "very inspiring"; "a real breath of fresh air"; "real genuine"; "willing to bat for you"; and "someone who has become a friend and who I can confide in." One participant said staff "actually care and want to keep people out of jail." Another attributed his positive AJC experience fully to the staff: "I didn't run into a good program," he remarked, "I ran into some good people, which [enabled] me to move forward."

Participants gave specific examples of ways staff assisted them. "[The case manager] always calls and checks up on me to see what I need," said one post-release participant. Another noted a small gesture that had a big impact, "[A staff member] picked me up from the bus stop when [it was] raining." Especially important was staff follow-through. A post-release focus group participant said: "There hasn't been anything [the reentry specialist] said she could do for me that she hasn't done." Those words were echoed by others. Staff dedication appeared to ease the transition to post-release services: one participant noted that connecting to the community AJC was a way for participants "to show [the staff] that they respect the program."

"[The staff] care. It's not just something they say but it's something we can see."

Participants also appreciated the warmth of staff members. "I'm not used to asking for help," a post-release focus group participant said, "So talking to them and feeling comfortable [makes it] a lot easier … to ask for help." One pre-release participant remarked "[The staff] care. It's not just something they say but it's something we can see." When participants had histories of trauma, this feeling of genuine support was important. "I didn't grow up with a mom or dad," remarked another pre-release participant, "I never knew that love. I finally feel like somebody cares what happens to me." Participants felt an especially strong rapport with staff members who had histories of justice involvement with several describing a formerly incarcerated staff member as "a role model for me."

Some staff were stretched too thin. Participants in some sites said program staff were overburdened with large caseloads (staff in three of these sites reported caseloads of more than 80). One post-release participant shared that she would like "a case worker that can call [her] back." Another said, "To keep it real, she didn't really get around to me to make my resume… she was so busy with a lot of people she didn't get a chance to work with me." Participants suggested that a lower participant-to-case-manager ratio would improve follow-up, communication, and case management. Yet, participants in several sites noted that more inmates could benefit from AJC services, such as inmates held for long periods before sentencing who were not eligible for services.

One post-release participant shared that she would like "a case worker that can call [her] back."

"It would be nice if…": Suggestions for improvement

Participants expressed a desire for additional services, improved operations, and better coordination with the corrections system.

Additional services. Many participants requested additional services from their jail-based AJC (see box). AJC services varied across sites, so services that were requested in some sites were readily available in others. For example, participants noted the need for more specialized and advanced training and wanted AJC services that could help them develop new skills, such as computer classes and professional classes that provide certificates upon completion. As we describe in a companion brief, *"Providing Services in a Jail-Based AJC,"* some sites did offer pre-release occupational skills training. A participant who completed Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) training before release noted that this type of training "gives you a leg up on the competition." Participants also requested financial and other assistance with preparation for college-level courses and registration in college.

Requests for more or additional services

- More specialized and advanced training
- Career assessment
- More computer and Internet access
- Job search and applications before release
- Mock interviews with and stronger connections to employers
- Work clothing
- Help obtaining high school equivalency and college entry
- Assistance obtaining driver's licenses and other transportation assistance
- Networking with former participants
- Cash assistance on release

Better coordination with corrections. Some participants noted areas for improvement to the operation of the jail-based AJC (see box). A common theme in these comments was that the jail and parole systems did not always facilitate service delivery. "The program wants to help people, but parole doesn't let it," one participant said, explaining that the Department of Corrections "is the hurdle inside, and parole [is the hurdle] outside." Some participants described difficulty accessing the jail-based AJC—for example not being promptly escorted to class. After release, the requirements of parole could conflict with the obligations associated with AJC participation and employment. "You have to meet with your [parole officer] once a week, you got to do this or do that, and then you got to work, and then you have to go to another [program]. It's hectic. [You] have to make a serious decision: …Am I going to miss this or that?" To address these challenges, one AJC worked with parole so that participants who worked during the day could check in during the evening.

Frequently suggested changes to jail-based AJC operations

- Better alignment with corrections
- More time in class and opportunities to present
- More promotion of AJC services in the jail and larger class size
- Better communication about services offered

Conclusion

Participants in pre-release and post-release focus groups agreed that AJC services gave them hope and helped them prepare for successful reentry. One pre-release participant repeated the words a staff member had spoken: "This is an opportunity for a reset." Although participants in some sites noted the need for some improvements, in many cases, the comprehensive AJC case management helped participants set and work toward goals. "My goal," one participant said before release, "[is] to walk out of these doors and not come back, to keep my mind focused on getting a job, and have support and a fall-back network."

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- "Data Management for Pre- and Post-Release Workforce Services" by Jillian Stein
- "Engaging Participants in Workforce Services after Release from Jail" by Samina Sattar

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