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Implementing Employment Programs to Support Reentry: Lessons from the 2018 and 2019 Reentry Project Grants

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Other study publications

1. Portrait of the Reentry Project Grantees
2. Common Indicators of Recidivism Used in Program and Policy Evaluations
3. Advancing Employment Opportunities for Justice-Involved Individuals through Work-Based Learning: Experiences from Reentry Project Grantees
4. Connecting Reentry Project (RP) Participants to In-Demand Local Industries: Insights from RP Grant Programs
5. Participants' Perspectives During Reentry Project Programs
6. Adult and Young Adult Reentry Project Grants: Differences in Service Offerings and Implementation Challenges

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Contents

Tables

Figures

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Executive Summary

Individuals released from incarceration face substantial obstacles to successful reentry. More than 40 percent of prison and jail inmates lack a high school degree or its equivalent (Denney et al. 2014), and many report problems with substance abuse and mental health or physical impairments (Bronson and Berzofsky 2017). Upon release, they often have difficulty finding jobs because of these obstacles, the stigma of being a former offender, and limits on the types of jobs they can obtain because of restrictions on occupational licensing for people with criminal records (Pager 2003; Holzer et al. 2004; Raphael 2014; CSGJC 2020). Moreover, they tend to be released into urban neighborhoods that have high rates of poverty and other social problems (La Vigne and Kachnowski 2003; Travis et al. 2001). Dramatic changes in the economy beginning in March 2020 and brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic only further exacerbated the challenges for this population (Desai et al. 2021).

Not surprisingly given these challenges, Internal Revenue Service data representing 2.9 million individuals show that 45 percent of those released from state prisons are without employment one year following release (Looney and Turner 2018). Quantitative and qualitative evidence demonstrates that employment is an important component of successful reentry and desistance—because it provides a needed source of income and serves as a prosocial activity that can help an individual establish healthy routines and reduce the likelihood that he or she will engage in risky behaviors (Bellotti et al. 2018; Ramakers et al. 2017). Given that, in 2019, more than 608,000 individuals were released from state and federal prisons (Carson 2020) and more than 10.3 million were admitted to local jails with an average stay of under one month before release (Zeng and Minton 2021), there is substantial need for support to help returning individuals prepare for, find and retain employment.

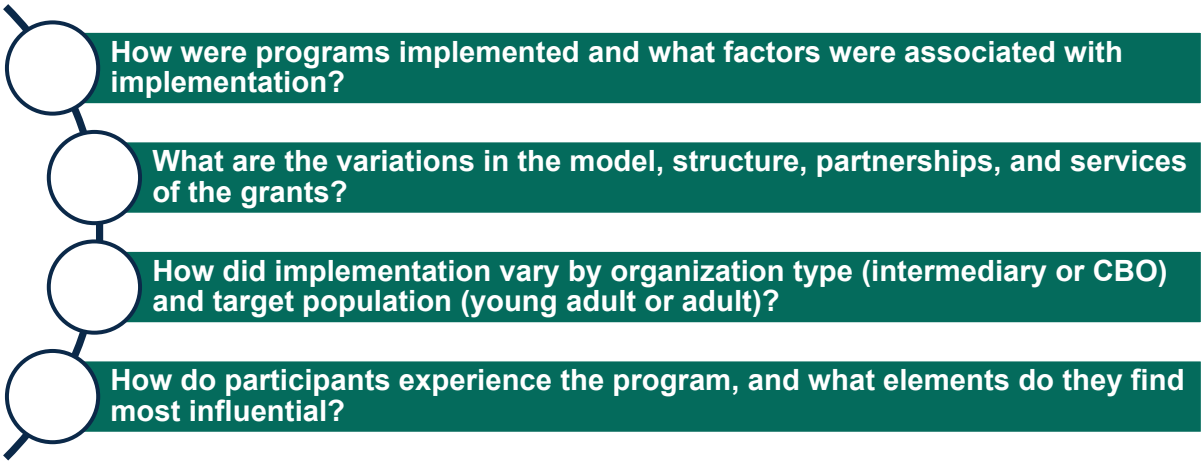
For two decades, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has invested in reentry services by committing substantial funding toward programs serving justice-involved young adults and adults. Among its many investments, between 2017 and 2019, DOL awarded over $243 million in Reentry Projects (RP) grants to improve participants' employment and criminal justice outcomes (DOL 2022a). Reentry grants aim to serve either adults (individuals over 24) recently released from incarceration or young adults (individuals between ages 18 and 24) who have been involved in the juvenile or adult justice system. Reentry grants were awarded to both intermediary organizations that serve large numbers of participants across multiple subgrantees and states, and smaller, community-based organizations (CBOs) (U.S. DOL 2018, 2019).

Eligible RP grantees included community- or faith-based non-profit organizations located in high-crime, high-poverty communities. In addition to applying as either an intermediary or CBO grantee, applicants were required to select a target population: adults (ages 25 or older) or young adults (ages 18 to 24). RP grants were 36-39 months long, including a three-month planning period, 24 months of enrollment and service provision, and a nine or 12-month follow-up period to assess participants' employment and criminal justice outcomes (DOL 2017, 2018, 2019). All grantees were operating at different grant phases, meaning some grantees were in early stages of operation while others were concluding operations, when the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic appeared to affect enrollment, service delivery and the outcomes of participants.

In 2017, DOL's Chief Evaluation Office contracted with Mathematica and Social Policy Research Associates to build evidence about effective strategies to serve people with prior justice involvement and facilitate their successful reentry into the community. To understand the implementation of the RP grant

programs across a broad range of intermediaries and CBOs, the evaluation team aimed to answer four broad research questions developed in consultation with DOL (Figure ES.1).

Figure ES.1. Reentry Project evaluation implementation study research questions



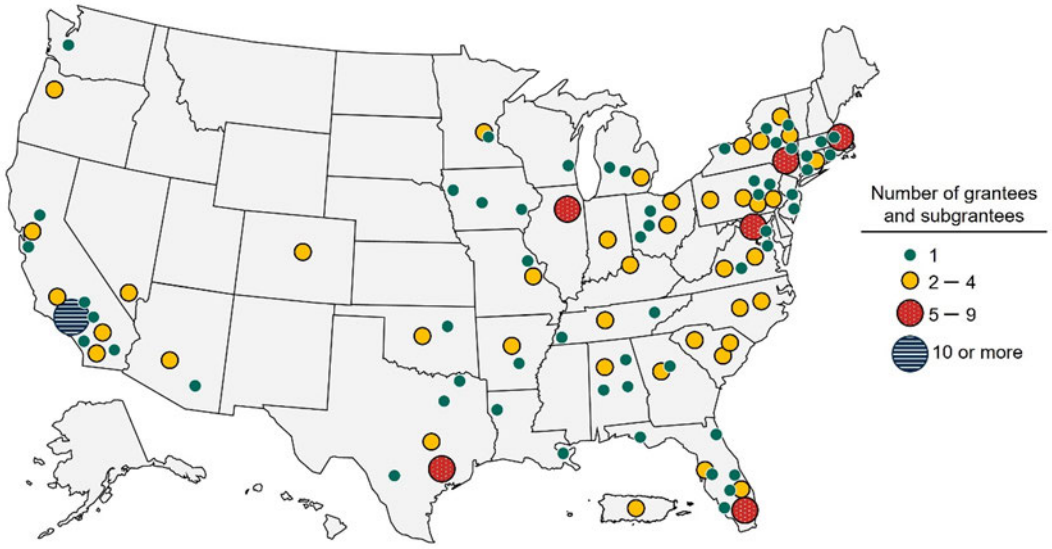
This report presents the findings from the implementation study, which includes analysis of data from virtual sites visits with 27 sites that received 2018 or 2019 grant or subgrant awards, a grantee survey administered to all 2017, 2018, and 2019 grantees, and Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS) records dating from program year (PY)2018 Q1 to PY2021 Q2 or July 1, 2018 to December 31, 2021. This report focuses on grantee survey findings and analysis of data from WIPS for 2018 and 2019 grantees.

A. Characteristics of the Reentry Project grantees and the communities they served

Key characteristics of the grantees and the communities they served include:

- **RP grants operated nationwide, serving primarily urban areas.** The RP grants were awarded to organizations across the United States, with the majority of recipients (78 percent) implementing their programs in urban or suburban areas. The intermediary and CBOs awarded RP grants between 2017 and 2019 provided programs in 34 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (Figure ES.2). A total of 58 programs served entirely urban areas, 28 served both rural and urban areas and two served rural areas exclusively.
- **RP grants were close to evenly distributed between adult and young adult grantees.** In 2018 and 2019, 40 percent of grants were awarded for serving adults and 60 percent for serving young adults.
- **Community characteristics, including local economic factors and existing reentry initiatives, often supported RP grant implementation.** Program staff from 15 of the 27 sites perceived that the presence of employers and industries in their communities that are open to hiring individuals with criminal backgrounds supported their ability to connect participants to jobs. Program staff from nine of the 27 sites visited in 2022 described that community initiatives such as reentry roundtables appeared to support the availability of resources and employment opportunities for individuals with justice involvement.

Figure ES.2. Locations of 2017–2019 Reentry Project (RP) grant programs



Source: Grantee applications and grantee surveys.

Note: Grantees refers to community-based organizations that received RP grants. Subgrantees is used to refer to local programs operated by subgrantees of intermediary grantee organizations.

- **Common barriers to employment among individuals with justice involvement in communities served by the grant included perceived employer bias, skill gaps, and substance use.** Six of 17 sites citing employer biases as barriers to employment specifically described challenges placing individuals with violent offenses in employment. Respondents from five sites noted that although employers said they value soft skills, when it came down to placing participants, what employers really wanted was to hire individuals with high school equivalency and/or certifications that documented their skills. Drug use was mentioned as another common barrier to employment by 7 sites. Five sites shared that even in communities where medicinal and recreational marijuana use is legal, employers maintain restrictions against its use.

B. Developing Reentry Project programs

Through the RP grants, DOL prioritized the development of programs drawing on "evidence-based and informed interventions or promising practices" to ensure that grantees developed comprehensive programs that fully address the needs of individuals with justice involvement (U.S. DOL 2017). Key findings related to the development of RP programs include the following.

- **Receiving prior reentry-related grants, including DOL grants, was reported to afford organizations the opportunity to build on prior successes, solidify services, and maintain partnerships to serve reentry populations in their communities.** Of the 84 Reentry Project grants awarded in 2018 and 2019, 37 were awarded to an organization with at least one prior DOL reentry grant (e.g., Training to Work, Reentry Employment Opportunities, Linking Employment Activities Pre-release, Pathways to Justice). Of the 27 sites that participated in virtual visits, 15 had received at least one prior DOL reentry grant, and 10 had received at least one RP grant prior to their most recent grant. Intermediary grantees, in particular, noted some benefits to receiving a prior grant. For example, two of the intermediaries shared that their subgrantees are typically involved in the grant

application process, which was helpful since for RP grants, subgrantees needed to be identified prior to the grant award.

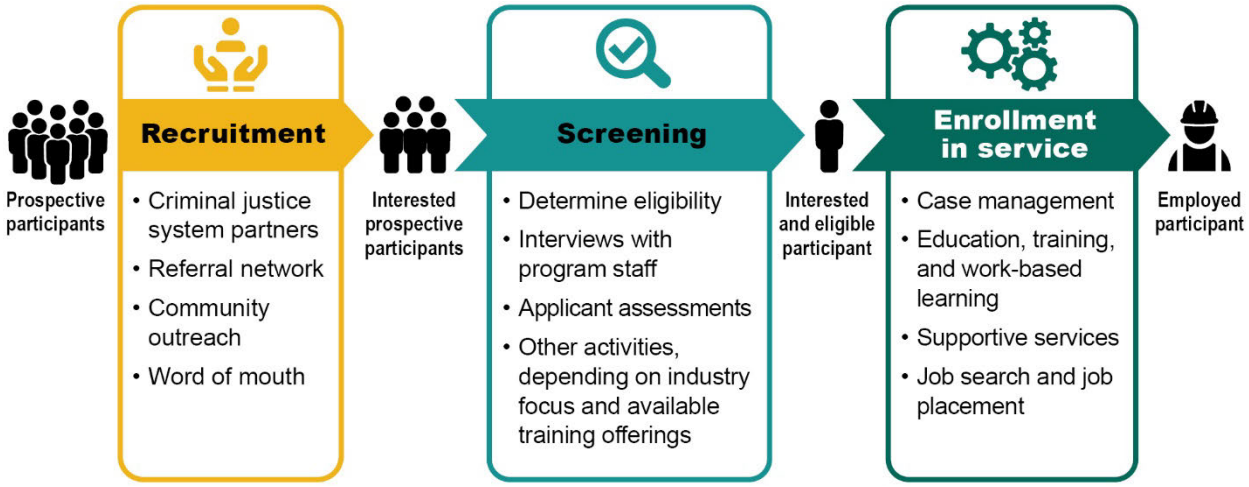
- **RP grantees reported prior experience providing education and training, as well as participating in sector strategies.** The grantees that responded to the survey reported having an average of about 23 years providing education or training programs and 18 years engaging employers in sector strategies. Overall, the majority of grantees' programs (57 programs) existed prior to their receipt of an RP grant. However, as noted by 11 sites during virtual site visits, prior experience often focused on providing these services to a general population rather than just those with prior justice system involvement.
- **Nearly all RP grantees possessed experience serving reentry populations through DOL grants or other programs.** All but 5 of the 66 2018 and 2019 RP grantees that responded to the grantee survey reported having experience providing services to individuals with justice involvement prior to their grant. Those with prior experience serving individuals with justice involvement reported an average of 22.1 years of experience. Six of the sites that participated in virtual visits mentioned their organization was founded with the intention of supporting those with criminal justice involvement. Additionally, during site visits, a few program sites described providing complementary services to individuals with justice involvement, such as counseling and mentoring (4 sites), other reentry programming (3 sites), and housing (2 sites), in addition to their RP program.
- **Partner input, labor market information, and participant needs were the most common factors the grantees considered when determining service delivery and training strategies to implement.** Grantee survey results suggest that workforce development boards (54 percent of grantees), community-based organizations (39 percent), and employer partners (49 percent) typically provided grantees with guidance on program strategies and goals. During virtual visits, seven sites shared that their partners played a role in the application and planning phases of their program. Similarly, seven sites described engaging employers when developing service and training strategies.
- **The intermediary grantees selected subgrantees, specified the service model, oversaw subgrantee performance, and provided technical support as the subgrantees carried out service delivery.** As described by the four intermediaries interviewed during virtual site visits, identifying subgrantees entailed internal assessments of regional affiliates to determine fit for the grant based on DOL requirements (4 intermediaries), programming offered by the affiliate (3 intermediaries), past experience working with reentry populations (3 intermediaries), and whether the subgrantees had established partners to support the provision of program services (2 intermediaries). Intermediaries were reported to set forth service delivery models that their subgrantees used to provide similar services to RP participants, regardless of program location. Nearly all (22) intermediary grantee respondents to the grantee survey reported that their subgrantees provided a similar service model that was specified by the intermediary. In addition to prescribing a uniform service model, during virtual visits the intermediaries all described having uniform coordination processes with their subgrantees. Coordination was done through regular check-ins and performance reviews either on a monthly (3 intermediaries) or weekly basis (1 intermediary).
- **All grantees employed a project/program director overseeing their grant and a case manager and job coach/job developer/employment specialist on staff to support service delivery.** When asked in the grantee survey about the desired staff characteristics and experience, the grantees reported valuing good communication skills (29 percent) and willingness to be a strong advocate for participants (32 percent). However, the other most desired skill for case managers was prior

experience working with people with criminal justice involvement (52 percent); for employment services staff the other most desired skill was the ability to work effectively with people from diverse backgrounds and with diverse perspectives (43 percent).

C. Enrolling, supporting, and serving Reentry Project program participants

According to the Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS) data, 2018 and 2019 grantees enrolled a total of 17,361 participants in their RP programs. To reach their target population, RP grantees employed a range of strategies for identifying, recruiting, and enrolling potentially eligible individuals in RP-funded services. Figure ES.3 presents the typical recruitment, screening, and enrollment process followed by the RP grantees.

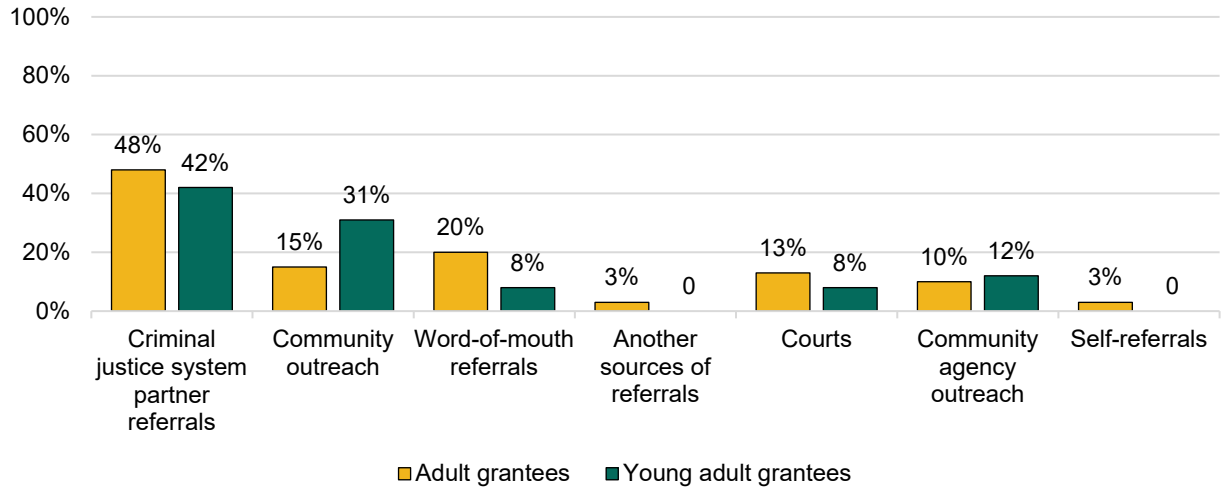
Figure ES.3. Typical sequence for linking potential participants to Reentry Project services



Source: Virtual site visits (N = 27).

- **Adult and young adult grantees relied on similar strategies to identify and recruit potential participants.** As identified in the grantee survey, RP grantees typically relied on referrals from criminal justice system partners to drive enrollment in their RP programs (Figure ES.4). Young adult grantees also reported identifying a large number of participants through their community outreach efforts, while adult grantees more often relied on word-of-mouth referrals and referrals from other sources.
- **Through virtual visits, sites highlighted common outreach and referral strategies, including connecting with criminal justice system partners, creating referral networks, participating in community outreach and promoting word-of-mouth referrals.** Twenty-four of the 27 sites involved in virtual visits discussed recruiting participants through criminal justice partners. At least nine sites discussed their partnerships with probation and parole staff specifically for participant referrals. In addition to probation and parole staff, four site visit respondents mentioned receiving referrals from prison and jail staff, and six cited referrals from judges and staff from district courts. Respondents from at least 16 site visit sites described conducting community outreach, such as attending community meetings or special events, to engage potential participants. At least 12 sites highlighted the role of word-of-mouth in recruiting participants.

Figure ES.4. Percentage of Reentry Project grantees ranking each recruitment method as its largest referral source, by grant type



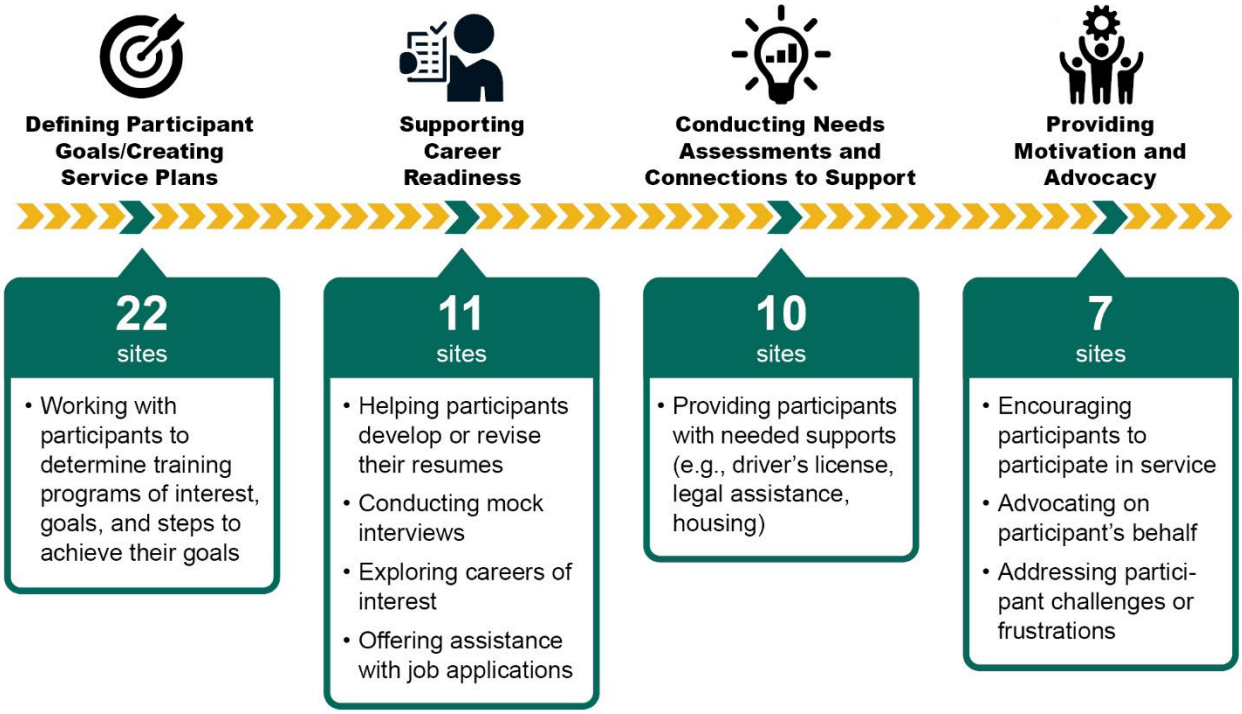
Source: Responses from grantee survey administered to 2018 and 2019 RP grantees (adult grantees N = 40; young adult grantees N = 26) from questions asking, "Which of the following is a source of referrals to your RP program?" and "Of the referral sources you identified, which has provided the largest number of referrals to your RP program?"

- **After determining eligibility based on DOL's established criteria, RP grantees employed multiple strategies for screening potential participants to ensure their suitability for RP programming.** As reported in the grantee survey, common screening activities included interviewing with program staff (95 percent of grantees), completing application forms (94 percent), and undergoing a criminal record review (83 percent of grantees). Compared to adult grantees, young adult grantees more frequently reported assessing potential participants' educations levels and prior work experience as well as requiring interviews and application forms.
- **Despite their outreach efforts, RP grantees reported challenges enrolling and recruiting participants.** Most (69 percent) grantees indicated in the survey that recruiting participants was "somewhat" or "very" challenging. Recruitment proved to be especially challenging for young adult grantees, with 96 percent of young adult grantees identifying it as "somewhat" or "very challenging." Virtual site visits provided further insights, with at least 13 sites reporting that recruitment became challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic due to court closures, restricted contact between referring partners, suspension of community outreach activities, and greater isolation that limited word-of-mouth referrals.

After enrolling participants, RP grantees delivered case management, education and training, and job placement services to help participants achieve their goals.

- **Case management was an integral component of program service delivery.** Ninety-seven percent of surveyed grantees had at least one case manager, with an average of 2.5 case managers per RP program. Interviewed participants and program staff from at least nine virtual visit sites emphasized the importance of the case manager/participant relationship in motivating participant success. As illustrated in Figure ES.5, program staff from visited sites identified common goals for case management services.

Figure ES.5. Case management goals as identified by site visit respondents



Source: Virtual site visits (N = 27).

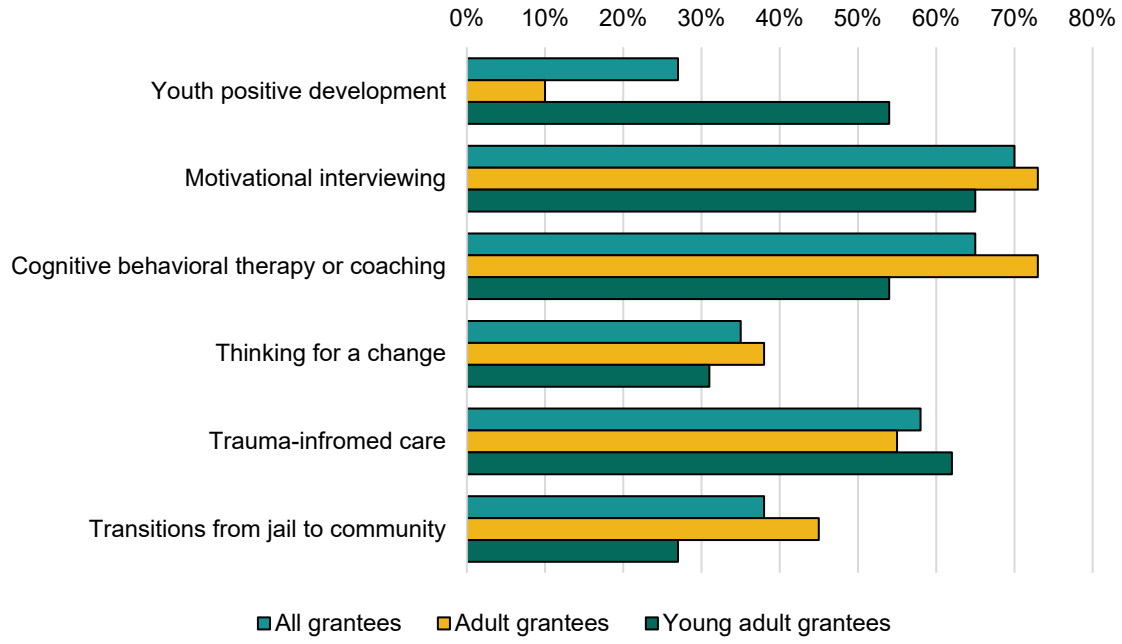
Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive and individual sites may have identified more than one goal.

- **Intermediary grantees reported establishing set case management models that their subgrantees followed while CBO grantees developed models to meet local needs**. Intermediary organizations reported providing their subgrantees with guidance regarding their case management models to promote consistent participant experiences across subgrantee locations. For example, to encourage overall uniformity throughout programming, three visited intermediaries stated that their 10 subgrantee CBOs all followed a standard model of service delivery. As highlighted through virtual visits, CBO grantees all described developing their case management models based on local community context, such as availability of other services in their communities, and participant needs.
- **RP grantees often hired staff to fill case manager roles but encountered challenges retaining case management staff.** When hiring case managers, grantees sought candidates with the ability to work effectively with people with diverse backgrounds (47 percent), familiarity with services in the community (30 percent), good communication skills (29 percent), and willingness to be a strong advocate for participants (32 percent), according to the grantee survey. Despite the prominent role that case managers played, interviewed program staff from at least nine visited sites experienced turnover or difficulty hiring for the position, indicating that the labor market made retaining case managers challenging.
- **Case management included a series of services designed to support participants in becoming self-sufficient, with the most frequently provided services focused on planning.** Nearly all grantees used assessments to determine service plans (98 percent of surveyed grantees) and developed individual career or development plans (96 percent of surveyed grantees). As described through virtual visits, case managers also sought to build rapport with participants through the service

planning process. For example, program staff from at least 22 visited sites discussed their career or development plan process, which they explained helped build relationships with participants, while also helping them define their goals and determine which services they wanted or needed (training, education, or supportive services) (Figure ES.6).

- **Case managers also used specialized approaches for meeting RP participants' case management needs, and using evidence-based case management models was a requirement of the grant** (U.S. DOL 2017, 2018, 2019). Reflecting the differences in the needs of populations served through the adult and young adult grants, adult and young adult grantees reported embedding different specialized approaches in their case management models (Figure ES.6). Unsurprisingly, more than half of the young adult grantees (54 percent) reported integrating youth positive development in their case management models compared to 10 percent of adult grantees. Similarly, almost half of the adult grantees (45 percent) indicated that they focused on transitions from jail to community in their case management models compared to only 27 percent of young adult grantees.

Figure ES.6. Percentage of grantees using specialized approaches for case management, by grant type



Source: Responses from grantee survey administered to 2018 and 2019 RP grantees (adult grantees, N = 40; young adult grantees, N = 26) from question asking, "Which of the following case management models are used in your RP program?

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive so individual grantees may have selected more than one case management model.

- **Case management staff collaborated with partner programs to address participants' barriers to employment.** As identified in the grantee survey, RP grantees frequently established formal partnerships with local American Job Centers (79 percent), corrections and rehabilitation departments (58 percent), and community colleges and other institutes of higher education (61 percent). At least 25 sites included in virtual visits indicated that they referred participants to program partners, such as

community-based organizations, churches, and legal aid organizations, to cover supportive service needs.

- **Due to the COVID pandemic, more case management occurred virtually than grantees had originally planned.** At least 15 visited sites described offering virtual case management at times. Interviewed program staff noted that this made it more challenging to engage participants and build important connections.
- **Commonly reported challenges related to case management included maintaining participant engagement, addressing participant needs and navigating the pandemic.** Eighty-three percent of surveyed grantees said that engaging and retaining participants was somewhat or very challenging. Engaging participants proved particularly challenging for young adult grantees (96 percent of surveyed young adult grantees). Program staff from 20 sites included in virtual visits wished their referral partners had more capacity to provide participants with mental health, substance use disorder treatment, housing, and transportation services. According to staff from at least eight visited sites, the pandemic was also a key challenge for case management because they shifted to virtual services with little planning time and had to support participants who had experienced additional traumas due to COVID-19.
- **Of the 14, out of 37, interviewed participants who offered insights on case management, 10 felt overwhelmingly positive about the service.** These individuals appreciated feeling valued and motivated by staff who clearly supported and believed in them. They felt they could count on their case managers.

Participants' appreciation for their case managers

"I wouldn't feel the same if they didn't have the same background, they wouldn't understand—if you actually walk the day to day, you see what I've been through…. It gives me the motivation to see that I can do the same thing you can."

"[Staff] didn't treat [me] like a felon."

"If I call them, if I need something, they'll always help."

— Interviewed RP participants

In addition to case management services, RP grantees connected participants with education and training offerings to help participants become self-sufficient and connect with pro-social activities.

- **Grantees offered a diverse set of education and training opportunities to participants.** Per the grantee survey, 98 percent of grantees offered occupational skills training, 80 percent facilitated high school equivalency exam preparation, 44 percent provided college entrance exams assistance, 68 percent offered help acquiring financial aid, and 21 percent extended other educational supports. As described during virtual visits, sites targeted a variety of sectors for training—informed by labor market information, partners, and participant interests—and facilitated access to industry-recognized credentials, such as OSHA certifications, forklift certificates, and certified nursing assistant credentials.
- **Available training opportunities often included work-based learning (WBL) offerings.** As identified through the grantee survey, RP grantees most frequently offered WBL through apprenticeships (82 percent) and on-the-job training (59 percent).[1] Except for unpaid internships, young adult grantees responding to the survey offered WBL opportunities more frequently than adult

[1] While over 50 percent of grantees reported offering apprenticeship and on-the-job training opportunities, WIPS data shows 1.3% of participants received registered apprenticeships and 2.3% received on the job training.

grantees. As reported through site visit data, at least 23 sites developed these opportunities by identifying employers who could provide quality WBL experiences. Sites also researched in-demand careers to provide WBL opportunities that could lead to marketable work experience. Across these grantees, the types of WBL opportunities as well as their length varied from light-touch job shadowing offerings to more intensive apprenticeship offerings.

- **Despite the availability of education opportunities, RP grantees identified challenges providing or connecting participants to these opportunities.** Over half of surveyed grantees (54 percent) reported some challenges providing or giving access to high-quality education-related activities. Respondents from 14 sites involved in virtual visits noted that the length of educational programs often disincentivized participants from completing the educational programs. According to the site visit respondents, participants' financial constraints exacerbated this problem, as they needed to earn money while enrolled in classes.
- **When offering training services, RP grantees identified target sectors for available training opportunities and in some cases established career pathways**. When selecting focal sectors, sites included in virtual visits considered local labor market information, employer input, availability of local training offerings, and participant interests. The 12 sites that established career pathways identified available trainings in select industry sectors, often construction, culinary/hospitality, and transportation/warehousing, and articulated how participants could progress along the established pathways. Other grantees helped participants explore career opportunities in select industries but did not offer articulated pathways.
- **While most sites (24 of 27 sites involved in visits) reported having a mix of formal and informal education and/or training provider partners, more than half (55 percent) of grantees reported in the survey that they delivered at least some education and/or training services in-house.** Education services provided on site included high school equivalency exam preparation and testing, high school diploma classes, individualized tutoring, financial aid assistance, and college application assistance. Training offered on site primarily included construction, welding, machining, forklift, health care, culinary, and customer service.
- **Program participants from 10 of 23 sites described positive experiences with training and expressed that the services and certifications they received prepared them to secure employment or develop their career.** Three interviewed participants specifically noted that the trainings helped them with career advancement either through a promotion or getting a better job after their initial placement. Interviewed participants from four sites also provided various suggestions for improving education or training services: implementing more structured high school equivalency exam classes; providing individualized high school equivalency exam support; adding courses on such topics as financial literacy; offering additional trainings in industries outside the trades, such as barber training and cosmetology; more hands-on training in settings that replicate the job site; and access to more information on career advancement resources.

D. Connecting Reentry Project program participants to employment

In addition to supporting participants through education and training offerings, RP grantees worked to connect participants with employers in multiple ways to help them enter employment with an improved chance of success.

- **Work readiness services appeared to lay the foundation for grantees efforts to connect participants with employment.** More than three-quarters of the visited RP sites reported that they

provided RP participants with work readiness services and a variety of other pre-employment services (either in house, through partners, or both) that were designed to help participants with the soft skills needed in employment contexts. Work readiness services included pre-employment training courses, individualized training, and resume development assistance. Over 90 percent of grantees responding to the grantee survey reported providing work readiness training, resume workshops, and career assessments or interest inventories.

- **RP grantees often relied on pre-existing connections with local employers while also working to facilitate partnerships with new employers in their target industries to support job placement.** Reflecting the importance of these employer partnerships in meeting the needs of RP participants, more than 90 percent of grantee survey respondents indicated that the RP grants helped them develop stronger relationships with local employers willing to hire people with criminal records. Among survey respondents, 31 percent indicated that they established new employer partnerships, and 53 percent reported that they established formal partnership agreements with employers.
- **To facilitate partnerships with employers, RP grantees included in virtual visits described using multiple engagement strategies.** Commonly used strategies included holding regular meetings with employers, educating employers and encouraging them to hire individuals with justice involvement, and identifying employers who themselves have a history of incarceration or include employees with a history of justice-involvement into the fabric of their business model.
- **After recruiting employers, RP grantees included in virtual visits described strategies for maintaining partnerships, such as holding regular meetings, leveraging existing networks, providing on-going support and collaborating with employers on training content.** Reported strategies included holding regular meetings of employer advisory groups to provide feedback to the program on how trainees and employees were progressing and to cultivate a deeper understanding of "second chance" employment (six sites); leveraging and building on existing employer networks that they had developed through related work before receiving their RP grants (four sites); providing on-going support to employers and participants even after job placement (four sites) and collaborating with employers on training content and whether a participant is ready for job placement (three sites).
- **When working to place participants in employment, RP program staff provided intensive job search support, job placement, and job retention assistance.** Job placement assistance was reported as an important employment-focused service by 16 visited sites. They stressed that their programs build up to employment, with all the previous steps—assessment, goal setting, and training—leading up to job placement. RP staff then helped support career exploration, connected participants directly to employers for application and interviews, and provided ongoing support following placement. Six visited sites also shared the strategy of providing intensive support to teach participants how to search for jobs with the goal of building independence and their job search skills.
- **Seventy percent of RP grantees responding to the grantee survey described challenges placing participants in jobs.** Insights from virtual visits highlighted the specific challenges encountered. These included resolving participant transportation needs, identifying high quality jobs that provide livable wages, overcoming perceived labor market discrimination towards individuals with justice involvement, and addressing participant mental health needs.
- **Employer partners shared perceived successes in hiring workers and helping RP participants achieve stable employment at livable wages.** A dozen employer partners from visited sites shared success stories about coordinating closely with RP program staff to support new employees. One employer shared that "it's like we have a lifeline. We can get insight into how to make things better…

so that's an advantage to having a partnership like this, we can have this person succeed." Ten employer partners interviewed during site visits also shared their satisfaction with the employees they hired through their partnership with the RP site.

E. Reported successes, challenges, and looking forward

The 2018 and 2019 RP grants had a widespread reach with CBO and intermediary organizations enrolling more than 15,000 young adult and adult participants across 34 states, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico with the aim of helping these individuals find and retain stable employment and avoid entering, or in most cases, reentering the criminal justice system. Through the grantee survey and virtual visits, RP grantees identified the challenges and successes they encountered.

Commonly reported challenges working with participants included:

- **Meeting participants' basic needs.** When asked about the biggest participant-level challenges faced during implementation, respondents from 22 visited sites spoke about participants' unmet basic needs. In particular, they reported only limited access to stable housing (12 sites), mental health- and trauma-based services (12 sites), and transportation (11 sites). Respondents from at least one site each also mentioned participants confronting a lack of food, a lack of work clothes, and limited financial literacy skills.
- **Engaging participants and maintaining their interest.** Site visit respondents highlighted challenges with participant engagement. Site staff found that they were unable to sufficiently motivate participants to enroll in the RP program in the first place or to keep them engaged and motivated once they were enrolled. Once participants were enrolled in RP, program staff from 16 sites described how it could be difficult to keep them engaged. Staff members from 12 of these sites found it particularly challenging to keep the attention of young adults and sustain their motivation. They described the young adult population as not wanting to work, not yet thinking about the type of life stability that more education and training promised, not completing training once begun, and generally having a short-term mindset about personal change.

Commonly reported successes working with participants included:

- **Helping participants shift their mindsets.** When highlighting their most important program successes, partners and participants from 11 sites discussed helping participants change their perspectives. Participants also noted shifts in mindset during interviews. One participant noted how he had an "incarcerated mindset" when he was first released and that his work in the program helped open his mind to reentering society by being more patient and thinking more positively.
- **Connecting participants to education and training.** Interviewed respondents, including program staff and participants, from 15 sites indicated that some of their programs' greatest successes were helping participants to complete education and training services and to obtain degrees and certifications. Five sites mentioned the success of helping participants obtain a high school diploma or high school equivalency certification. Most notable was how, in nine sites, staff and participants pointed to the importance of obtaining certificates in a wide range of fields.
- **Helping participants prepare for and find employment.** Four sites noted the importance of preparing participants for work either through completion of work readiness coursework; resume preparation; or helping them obtain paperwork, such as a driver's license or other identification. Additionally, helping participants find and retain jobs was one of the greatest successes noted in

interviews with 17 sites. Staff members from four sites also described helping participants find jobs with the potential for advancement.

- **Reducing recidivism.** When asked about implementation successes, staff members and participants from seven sites mentioned low rates of recidivism.

Grantees also reflected on successes and challenges they encountered when designing and implementing their RP programs.

- **Building partnerships.** Staff members from 17 sites involved in visits reported that growing and building their RP partnerships were the greatest implementation successes their programs experienced. One theme raised by site visit respondents in eight sites was the importance of identifying partners and individuals who understood participant needs, genuinely cared about them, and were a good fit for participant training and career interests. Staff members from four sites discussed that it was critical for partners to have staff with their own connections who were willing to reach out to new organizations to continue building the partnership.
- **Navigating the pandemic.** Site visit respondents from 17 sites mentioned COVID as one of the biggest implementation challenges. According to respondents, the COVID pandemic strained partner communications and relationships when partners closed down (4 sites), made it difficult to recruit and enroll participants (4 sites), and closed programs or led to staff being out of the office for illness (2 sites), further diminishing service delivery capacity when other program aspects were already strained. Nine sites explicitly discussed the process of switching from in-person to virtual service delivery. As one staff member put it, "The effect was the loss of a sense of community." Despite challenges, staff members for four sites (two of which also discussed challenges) pointed to at least some positive aspects of this switch to virtual service delivery. Staff members for one site talked about widening the range of services by giving participants access to classes at other locations.

While sustainability was not an explicit goal of the grant, respondents were asked during site visit interviews whether they planned to sustain their programs beyond the RP grants. At least 23 of the 27 sites reported holding conversations at the time of the site visits about sustainability beyond the grant. Of these sites, seven planned to continue their programs more or less as they were operated under RP. Staff members at seven other sites indicated that they planned to operate their programs in a somewhat reduced manner or with a few adjustments, mostly based on their inability to fund their programs at the same level as RP. Staff members from another nine sites had not developed a particular plan for sustaining services.

F. Next steps for the RP evaluation

While this implementation study aims to describe the programs and services implemented under RP grants and point to larger implementation lessons, it is also designed to help inform the findings of the impact study. The findings identified through the implementation study will be used to look both within and across RP grantees to explore variations among impact study grantees, variation between impact and non-impact study grantees and variations among intermediary grantees. Such results provide valuable information as context for the final impact evaluation report due in 2024.

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I. Introduction to the Reentry Project Grants and Evaluation

Individuals released from incarceration face substantial obstacles to successful reentry. More than 40 percent of prison and jail inmates lack a high school degree or its equivalent (Denney et al. 2014), and many report problems with substance abuse and mental health or physical impairments (Bronson and Berzofsky 2017). Upon release, they often have difficulty finding jobs because of these obstacles, the stigma of being a former offender, and limits on the types of jobs they can obtain because of restrictions on occupational licensing for people with criminal records (Pager 2003; Holzer et al. 2004; Raphael 2014; CSGJC 2020). Moreover, they tend to be released into urban neighborhoods that have high rates of poverty and other social problems (La Vigne and Kachnowski 2003; Travis et al. 2001). Recent dramatic changes in the economy, beginning in March 2020, brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic only further exacerbated the challenges for this population (Desai et al. 2021).

Not surprisingly given these challenges, data from the Internal Revenue Service on 2.9 million incarcerated individuals showed 45 percent of those released from state prisons are without employment one year following release (Looney and Turner 2018). Quantitative and qualitative evidence demonstrates that employment is an important component of successful reentry and desistance—because it provides a needed source of income and serves as a prosocial activity that can help individuals establish healthy routines and reduce the likelihood that they will engage in risky behaviors (Bellotti et al. 2018; Ramakers et al. 2017). Given that, in 2019, more than 608,000 individuals were released from state and federal prisons (Carson 2020) and more than 10.3 million were admitted to local jails with an average stay of under one month before release (Zeng and Minton 2021), there is substantial need for support to help returning individuals prepare for, find, and retain employment

For two decades, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has invested in reentry services by committing substantial funding toward programs serving justice-involved young adults and adults. Among its many investments, between 2017 and 2019 DOL awarded almost $243 million in Reentry Project (RP) grants to improve participants' employment and criminal justice outcomes. RP grants aim to serve either adults (individuals over 24) recently released from incarceration or young adults (individuals ages 18-24) who have been involved in the juvenile or adult justice system. They were awarded to both intermediary organizations that serve large numbers of participants across multiple subgrantees and states, as well as smaller, community-based organizations (CBOs) that serve a smaller number of participants in a single location (U.S. DOL 2018, 2019).

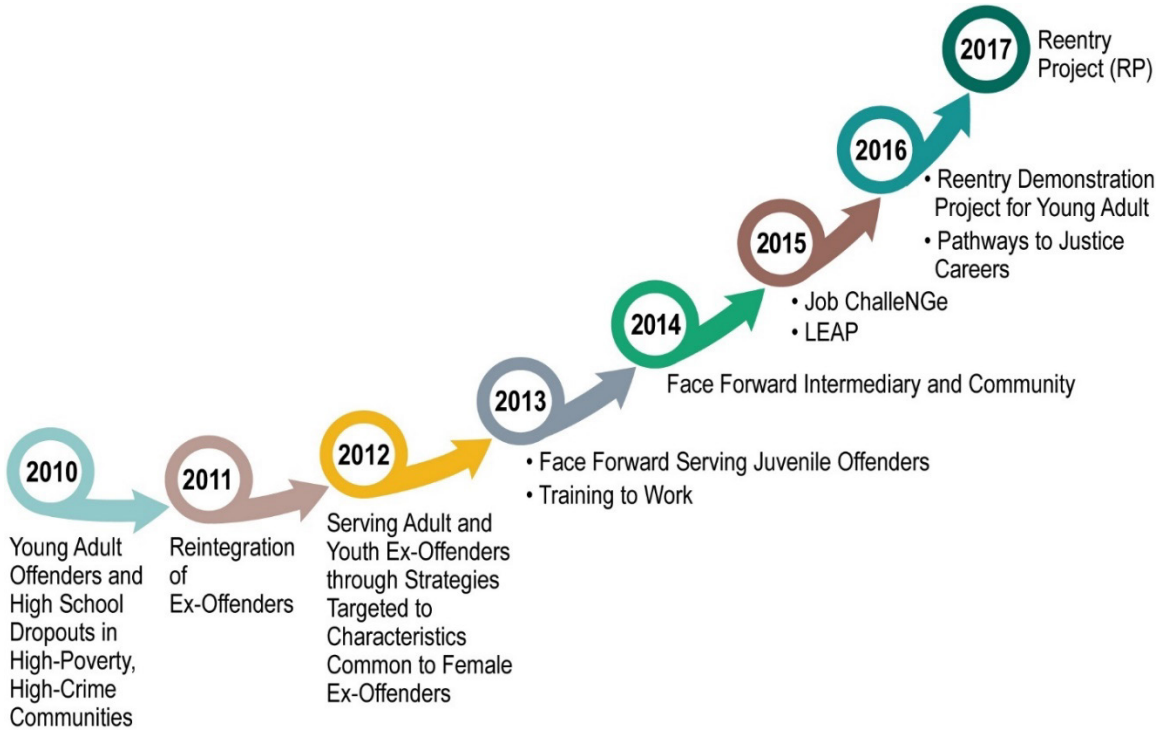
A. Emerging priorities for reentry employment and overview of the Reentry Project grants

The federal government recognizes the critical importance of supporting individuals as they return to communities from incarceration. In April 2022, the White House published a comprehensive strategy called "Incarceration to Employment" to expand employment opportunities to formerly incarcerated persons (The White House 2022). The plan builds on decades of work by numerous federal agencies to explore and implement new reentry programs and policies but acknowledges that successful reentry requires a broader, holistic approach. Acknowledged as a key player in this effort is the Reentry Employment Opportunity (REO) program within DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA).

Authorized by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA), the REO program aims to develop strategies and partnerships that facilitate successful implementation of state and local programs

that improve the workforce outcomes of justice-involved youth (individuals under age 18), young adults, and adults. The RP grants represent one investment in a series of DOL grant initiatives supporting reentry programming (Figure I.1). These investments also build on a long history of reentry grant initiatives funded by ETA prior to the establishment of the REO office.

Figure I.1. U.S. Department of Labor grant initiatives supporting reentry programming from 2010 to 2017

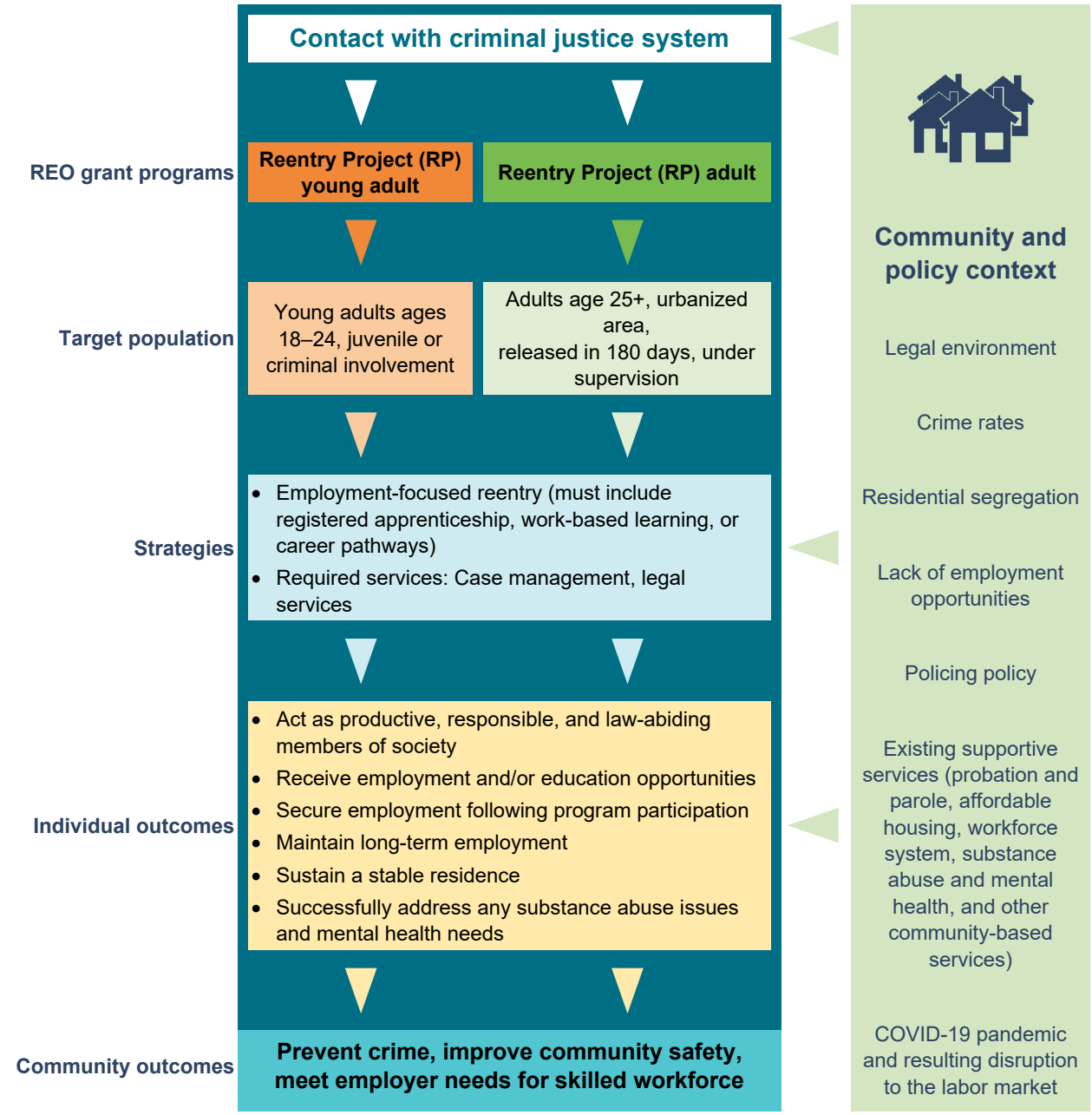


Source: U.S. DOL 2022b.

LEAP = Linking Employment Activities Pre-release.

While the design of the RP grants provided organizations with substantial flexibility in their program design, the Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOA) focused on evidence-informed or promising practices in employment-focused services as well as case management and legal services (U.S. DOL 2018, 2019). The specific services offered vary depending on the round of the grant and target group. However, as illustrated in the logic model (Figure I.2), RP grantees combine structured employment experiences—through models such as registered apprenticeship, work-based learning, and career pathways—with case management to facilitate the transition to unsubsidized employment.

Figure I.2. Reentry Project logic model for the 2017–2019 grantees



REO = Reentry Employment Opportunities.

Eligible RP grantees included community- or faith-based nonprofit organizations and located in high-crime, high-poverty communities. In addition to applying as either an intermediary or CBO grantee, they were required to select a target population: adults (ages 25 or older) or young adults (ages 18 to 24). In 2018 and 2019, DOL awarded grants to a total of 16 intermediaries and 68 CBOs. The grants were 36-39 months long, including a three-month planning period, 24-months of enrollment and service provision, and a nine or 12-month follow-up period to assess participants' employment and criminal justice outcomes. DOL awarded more than $243 to three rounds of grantees in 2017, 2018, and 2019 (U.S. DOL 2022a). All grantees were operating, although some toward the end of operations, when the COVID-19

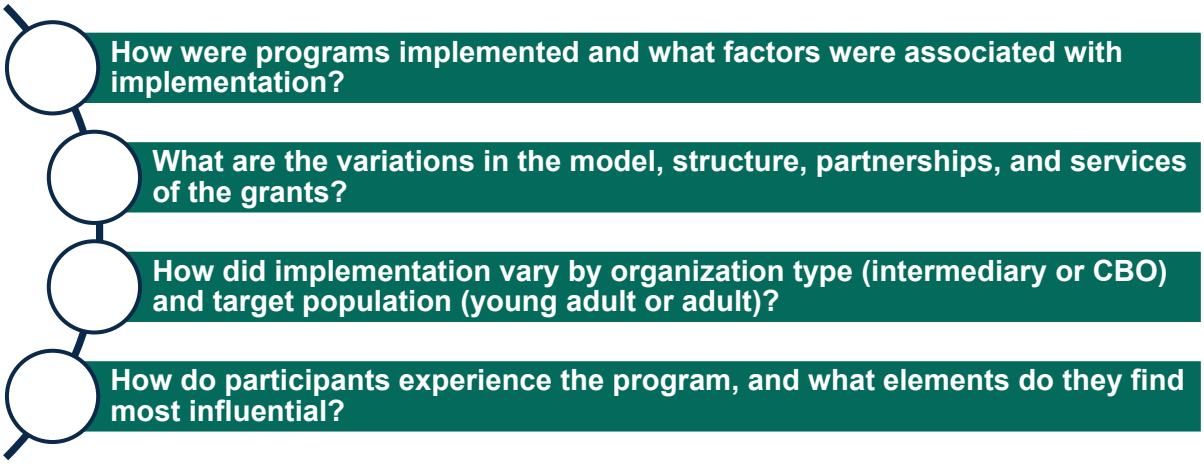
pandemic began in March 2020; this was reported to affect enrollment, service delivery, and the outcomes of participants.

B. Evaluating the RP grants

In 2017, DOL's Chief Evaluation Office has contracted with Mathematica and Social Policy Research Associates to build evidence about effective strategies to serve people with prior justice involvement and facilitate their successful reentry into the community. The evaluation aims to understand how the RP grant programs were implemented across a broad range of intermediaries and CBOs (*implementation study*), determine the impacts of the program on labor market and criminal justice outcomes (*impact study*), and measure the outcomes of a broader set of RP participants than those included in the impact study (*outcomes study*). Future reports will present results from the impact and outcomes studies.

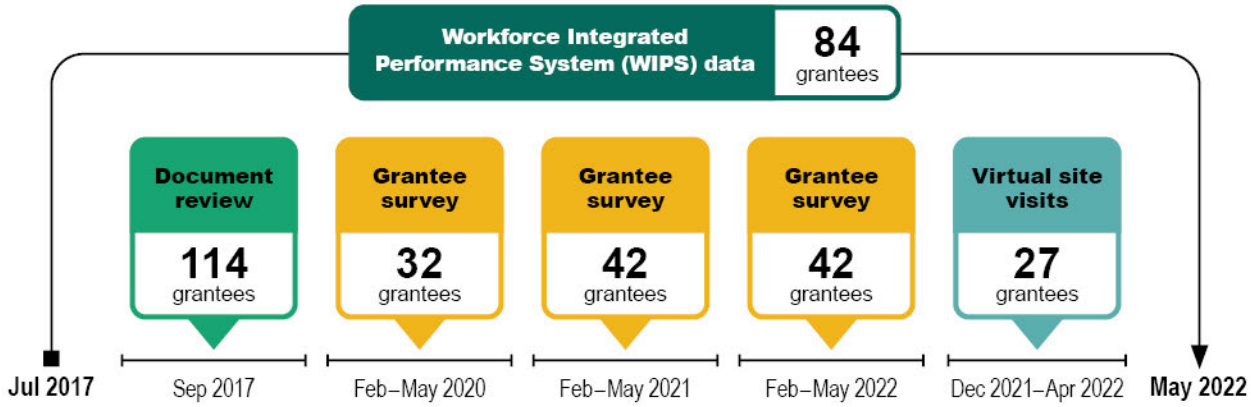
Goals and research questions. The implementation study has three main goals: (1) describe the structure of RP grant-funded services over two grant cycles (2018 and 2019), including how funding was used during these cycles, the ways in which grantees operated their programs, and the services grantees delivered; (2) highlight unique and potentially promising strategies to support justice system involved individuals, including strategies that grantees used during the COVID pandemic; and (3) inform the interpretation of impact study results by identifying structural differences across programs (for example, organization type, service delivery models, target population) as well as variations in implementation (for example, slower or faster to start enrollment, shutdowns due to COVID, and so on). The study will answer the research questions shown in Figure I.3.

Figure I.3. Reentry Project evaluation implementation study research questions



Data sources and analysis. Figure I.4 highlights the timing of data collection for each of the four implementation study data sources in relation to the RP grants. Additional information on the data collection activities and analysis approach for each is included in Appendix A.

Figure I.4. Reentry Project Implementation Study data collection timeline, July 2017–May 2022



An overview of the data sources and analysis methods follows:

1. **Grant documents.** Grant applications, program materials (such as recruitment materials or flyers, workshop syllabi, case management, and service planning documents) and grantee quarterly narrative reports submitted to DOL highlight each site's plans for implementation as well as self-reported progress, successes, and challenges.[2]
2. **Grantee survey.** The 20-minute survey was administered to all 2017, 2018, and 2019 grantees (a total of 116 organizations) to collect data on grantee characteristics, partnerships, RP program characteristics, participant recruitment and enrollment, and program service offerings.[3] This report focuses on findings related to the 2018 and 2019 grantees.[4]
3. **Virtual site visits to selected grantees.** The study team conducted virtual site visits to 27 the of 2018 and 2019 RP-funded program locations.[5] Further details on these grantees are available in the appendix to this report (Table A.2). The selection process was purposeful and considered a wide range of factors, including ensuring that we visited a blend of intermediary subgrantees and CBO grantees, both adult and young adult programs, and geographic diversity. Visits to each site typically lasted 2.5 days of interviews (spread over a calendar week) and included semi-structured interviews with program and partner administrators, intermediary administrators (if applicable), frontline staff, employer partners, and interviews with one or two program participants, if possible.[6]

[2] There were two grantees the study team did not receive grant documents for out of all 116 grantees.
[3] A forthcoming issue brief (Lewis and Stein 2022) developed as part of this evaluation summarizes findings related to the 2017, 2018, and 2019 grantees.
[4] Of the 84 grantees in 2019 and 2019, 82 completed the survey (66 CBOs and 16 intermediaries). Some grantees elected not to answer all questions in the survey. The percentages in this report on survey findings represent the affirmative answers from the grantees that answered a given question. Grantees were invited to fill out a survey for each grant they received, therefore a grantee with multiple types of grants or multiple grants across years completed multiple surveys. Four out of five sections of the grantee survey asked questions relevant to CBO grantees. Due to this survey structure, findings in this report focus on the 66 CBO grantee survey responses unless otherwise stated.
[5] Although the study completed 27 visits, one visit included only an interview with the grant manager and key frontline staff person due to timing and scheduling challenges.
[6] Virtual site visits occurred late in the grant implementation period, making it challenging to conduct participant interviews in all sites. Of the 27 visits, 23 included interviews with at least one participant.

4. **Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS) data.** The WIPS is a national database that contains data on participants in workforce programs funded by DOL, *including* the RP grants. The WIPS data contain individual-level demographic characteristics—including age, gender, race, ethnicity, disability status, education, employment status at program enrollment, and English learner status—as well as data on employment and training services received. The study includes RP data for the 2018 and 2019 grantees from July 2018 through December 2021.

Analysis strategies varied by data source. The quantitative data from the grantee survey and WIPS were analyzed using simple descriptive measures (means, minimum, maximum, median, percentages) to generate aggregated counts of responses. The team also explored frequencies in the grantee survey by major subgroups of grantees, including organization type (intermediary versus CBOs), year of grant award, and target population (adult versus young adult) and in the WIPS data by participant characteristics, the services they received, length of enrollment, and reasons for exit. The qualitative data from site visits were gathered in standardized write-up templates and systematically coded in NVivo software using a codebook aligned with the research questions. The coded data were then used to develop analytic tables to facilitate identification of qualitative themes and examine the intersection of codes to develop site summaries. Grant documents were used primarily for anecdotal evidence that may support or provide additional details for overarching themes or key findings collected through other implementation data sources. After identifying those themes or findings, the study team reviewed documents and pulled examples to highlight each phenomenon.

Use of implementation findings to inform the impact findings. While the implementation study aims to describe the programs and services implemented under RP grants and point to implementation lessons for future grants, it is also designed to help inform the findings of the impact study. Findings from the implementation study will look both within and across RP grantees to explore variations among grantees included in the impact study, variation between grantees included in the impact study and those that were not included, and variations among intermediary grantees. Such results provide valuable as context for the final impact evaluation report due in 2024.

Limitations of the study design. It is important to recognize the limitations associated with the implementation study. Although the study draws on multiple data sources, thereby allowing us to triangulate across them, it is not possible to document every aspect of program implementation, limiting the extent to which findings can be generalized to other contexts.

- **Data from site visits cannot be generalized across RP grants.** Site visit locations were purposefully selected. While the visits included a diverse group of sites, they were not random, and data collected will not be representative of all grants. Within a given site, participants selected for the interviews were also selected by grantees using a convenience sample.
- **Interview data may be incomplete.** Virtual site visit protocols were designed to collect as much information as possible in the time available and focused on soliciting candid responses related to the most important implementation topics as identified by the research questions. This approach, however, relies upon respondents' willingness to truthfully report on potentially sensitive topics. The virtual approach to data collection due to the COVID-19 pandemic may have further influenced respondents' openness.

- **The grantee survey provides only broad information.** To minimize burden on respondents, the survey was designed to take 20 minutes to complete and included questions focused on topics relevant to all grantees. RP grantees were implementing varied service delivery models, so survey questions were broad enough to apply to all grantees, limiting the amount of targeted information collected.
- **Analysis of implementation data requires subjective interpretation.** Analyzing responses to questions about implementation experiences requires some subjective interpretation. To improve our ability to describe implementation barriers and facilitators, we will use multiple sources of data for information about the grantees, allowing us to triangulate across respondents and data sources.

C. Roadmap for the report

This report highlights key implementation study findings that aim to address the research questions about the RP grants discussed above. Chapter II discusses the characteristics of the grantees and the local areas they served. Chapter III explores how grantees developed and staffed their programs aimed at serving justice-involved individuals through the RP grants. Chapter IV focuses on strategies used to recruit and enroll participants. Exploring the service models developed by grantees, Chapter V discusses delivery of case management and support services. Chapter VI describes education and training services. Chapter VII examines employment services and grantee connections with employers. Finally, Chapter VIII provides grantee perspectives on sustainability; summarizes key findings and lessons learned; discusses themes to inform the impact study; and shares considerations for future programming, future research, and next steps for the RP evaluation.

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II. Understanding the National and Local Grantee Context

Between 2017 and 2020 (the most recent data available during the RP grants examined), the United States' prison population continued its 10-year decline since it peaked in 2009 (1,615,487 individuals) with 1,489,363 individuals confined in a correctional facility in 2017 and 1,215,821 in 2020 (Bronson and Carson 2019; Carson 2021). Changes to local sentencing and criminal justice-related policies, as well as the First Step Act signed in 2018, could have played a role in reducing the number of people experiencing incarceration during this period (Gramlich 2021).

Recognizing that individuals exiting correctional systems face challenges that inhibit their ability to reenter the workforce and their community, the DOL has awarded grants as part of several initiatives intended to serve individuals with criminal justice system involvement (see Table II.1 for list of reentry initiatives funded since 2010). As such, the Reentry Projects of 2017, 2018, and 2019 were a continuation of these federal grants focused on improving the employment outcomes of individuals with justice system involvement through employment services, case management, and other supportive services, including legal services.[7]

Table II.1. U.S. Department of Labor's reentry initiatives prior to 2017, 2018, and 2019 Reentry Project grants, 2010–2016

Initiative	Years awarded	Population of interest	Key services
Young Adult Offenders and High School Dropouts in High-Poverty, High-Crime Communities [a]	2010, 2011, 2012	Young Adult (18–24) offenders and high school dropouts	Employment strategies, case management, training and educational strategies, mentoring, restorative justice, community-wide efforts to reduce crime and violence
Reintegration of Ex-Offenders	2011, 2012	Adult former inmates returning to their communities after serving time in justice facilities	Job training and employment preparation, mentoring and connections to support services such as housing, substance abuse programs, and mental health treatment
Serving Adult and Youth Ex-Offenders through Strategies Targeted to Characteristics Common to Female Ex-Offenders	2012, 2013	Previously incarcerated female adults and youth (14+)	Job training that leads to credentials in high-demand industries; employment preparation; mentoring; supportive services, such as housing and substance abuse and mental health treatment; family counseling; and assistance with parenting and child reunification
Face Forward Serving Juvenile Offenders	2013	Juvenile offenders (16–24)	Record expungement and/or diversion services,[b] mentoring services, education and training leading to industry-recognized credentials, and post-program support and follow-up services

[7] In addition to the services listed, the 2017 funding opportunity announcement for reentry project grants gave priority consideration if the lead organization or an intermediary subgrantee was in a designated promise zone. The 2018 funding opportunity announcement gave priority consideration to applicants identifying apprenticeship and the associated industry as their model or one of the models for which they based their program. The 2019 funding opportunity announcement gave priority consideration to both apprenticeship models and opportunity zones.

Initiative	Years awarded	Population of interest	Key services
Training to Work Grants	2013, 2014, 2015	Soon-to-be-released inmates (18+)	Workforce development activities, training leading to industry-recognized credentials, education, case management, mentoring, and follow-up services to help reduce recidivism and lead to long-term success
Face Forward Intermediary and Community Grants	2014, 2015	Formerly incarcerated adults and youth involved in the juvenile justice system	Case management, mentoring, education and training that leads to industry-recognized credentials, and services to seal juvenile records and providing opportunities to handle delinquency complaints outside of the juvenile justice system
Job ChalleNGe Grants	2015	Youth (16–18) with a criminal record	Work-based learning, and real work experience through field trips, job-shadowing and other opportunities to consider other career paths and prepare youth for the labor market
Linking to Employment Activities Pre-Release (LEAP)	2015, 2016	Soon-to-be-released inmates (Jails) (18–24)	Pre-release: Comprehensive American Job Center services, case management, transition services Post-release: Follow-up, support, and other services to help guide individuals on a path toward a career and away from the risks that may return them to jail
Reentry Demonstration Project for Young Adults	2016	Young Adult (18–24) offenders	Mentoring, career pathways, registered apprenticeship, family reunification, and other promising practices with a focus on providing occupational training and credentials
Pathways to Justice Careers	2016	Youth (16–21) at risk of dropping out of high school, criminal justice system involvement	Mentoring, career training, career exploration, and providing courses resulting in educational and skills credentials

Source: U.S. DOL 2022b.

[a] Also referred to as Serving Juvenile Offenders in High-Poverty, High-Crime Communities.

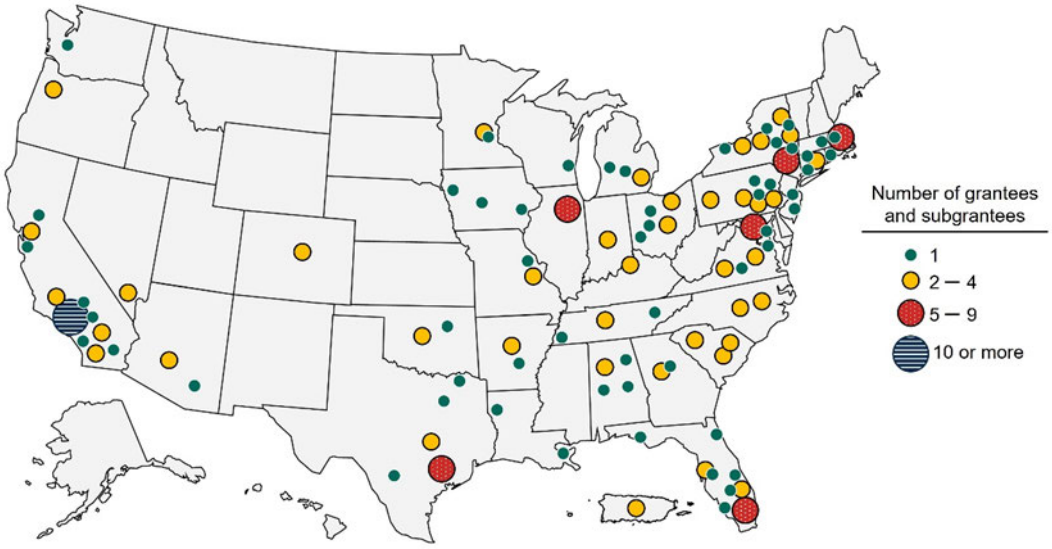
[b] Service component provided through a partner as a requirement of the grant.

A. Areas served by the RP grants and their characteristics

The RP grants were awarded to organizations across the United States, with the majority (78 percent) of recipients implementing their programs in urban or suburban areas. The intermediary and community-based organizations awarded RP grants between 2017 and 2019 provided programs in 34 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (Figure II.1). A total of 58 programs served entirely urban areas, 28 served both rural and urban areas, and 3 served rural areas exclusively.[8]

[8] In the 2018 RP FOA, rural and urban areas are defined "according to the U.S. Census 2010 definition [where] 'rural' encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area (see http://www.census.gov for more information)…any Census tract that is either an Urbanized Area or an Urban Cluster is considered 'urban;' any Census tract that is neither an Urbanized Area nor an Urban Cluster is considered 'rural.'"

Figure II.1. Locations of Reentry Project 2017–2019 grant programs



Source: Grantee applications and grantee survey responses for 2017–2019 grantees.

Grantees serving rural and urban locations or multiple locations noted that differences in community characteristics appeared to influence service provision. Three intermediary grantees and three of the direct grantees that served individuals in multiple communities mentioned during virtual visits that differences in community characteristics appeared to influence their provision of services. For example, a grantee serving both rural and urban communities at the time of the virtual site visit noted that the rural location did not have a public transportation system and fewer supportive services available to participants living in the county.

B. Grantee characteristics and local context

As described in the FOAs for the RP grants, DOL aimed to assist communities in providing comprehensive reentry programs to support the needs of individuals with juvenile or adult justice system involvement successfully transition back to their communities (U.S. DOL 2018, 2019). To receive RP grants, grantees identified the population, either adults (ages 25 and up) or young adults (ages 18–24) and "high-poverty, high-crime communities" to be served through grant funding (U.S. DOL 2018).[9]

1. Population of interest

A little more than half of the grants were used to provide services to young adult populations, defined as those between ages 18 and 24. Table II.2 provides the number of program sites using RP grants to serve adult and young adult populations.[10] In 2018 and 2019, the split between adult and young adult grantees was about 60 percent of programs serving young adults and 40 percent serving adults.

[9] In the 2018 RP FOA high-poverty communities are defined as, "communities with poverty rates of at least 25 percent as exhibited through the use of American Community Survey (ACS) data, and high-crime communities are defined as, "communities with crime rates within the targeted area that are higher than the rate for the overall city (for urban areas) or of non-metropolitan counties in the state (for rural areas)."

[10] Program sites is used to refer to the location where RP grant funded services were implemented. For example, an intermediary grant counts as a single grant, but services were delivered across several sites by their subgrantees.

Table II.2. Number of Reentry Project (RP) program sites by year, population of interest, and grantee type

	PY2018	PY2019	Total
RP Young Adult	**45**	**39**	**84**
Intermediaries	30	26	56
Community Based Organizations (CBOs)	15	13	28
RP Adult	**28**	**29**	**57**
Intermediaries	9	4	13
CBOs	19	25	44
Total	**73**	**68**	**141**

Source: Grant applications and clarifying calls.

Note: Intermediary counts include counts of subgrantees. Some CBOs and subgrantees received both young adult and adult grants, as well as PY2018 and PY2019 grants.

2. Local community context

During virtual visits to 27 of the program locations, 11 of the sites described that the COVID-19 pandemic had initially led to high unemployment rates and limited job opportunities for their participants. However, by the time of the visits beginning in January 2022, as reported during site visits, the local economies had started to improve, and these same sites shared that there was now an abundance of job opportunities for their participants as employers struggled to fill positions and relaxed requirements such as background checks. However, for 2 of these 11 sites the abundance of job opportunities were reported to lead to challenges findings participants as they no longer needed training to secure employment.

During site visits, the grantees also described that the major industries in their area that were friendly to hiring justice-involved individuals included construction (15 sites), culinary and hospitality (7 sites), manufacturing (8 sites), warehousing (7 sites), and transportation (6 sites).

3. Community efforts to help individuals with justice involvement become employed

The presence of industries friendly to hiring justice-involved individuals (14 sites) and a motivation from specific employers to help reentry population (3 sites) were mentioned as facilitators to finding employment for participants in the communities served by 14 of the program sites. Perceived facilitating community factors included:

- **Presence of employers and industries open to hiring individuals with justice involvement.** Program staff from 14 of the sites perceived that the presence of employers and industries in their communities that are open to hiring individuals with criminal backgrounds supported their ability to connect participants to jobs. For example, one site noted that construction sites have labor agreements in place and have to hire a certain percentage of their workers who are “disadvantaged,” which includes those returning from incarceration
- **Community initiatives focused on reentry.** Program staff from nine of the sites visited in 2022, described that community initiatives such as reentry roundtables appeared to support the availability of resources and employment opportunities for individuals with justice involvement. For example, one site described being a member of a reentry taskforce that coordinates reentry from state facilities

by developing a reentry plan; assigning a parole officer; and identifying individual's immediate needs, risks, and interests, which makes it easier to connect individuals to services to support reentry and employment opportunities. Site staff reported that one of the current initiatives of the task force is supporting legislation around streamlining the documentation and identification process for newly released individuals, which would help individuals secure identification. Securing proper identification was described by the site as a huge barrier to employment.

- **Employer commitment to providing second chances.** In some communities, employers were self-motivated to hire individuals with criminal justice backgrounds. Employer partners from three sites shared that their beliefs in second chances motivated them to give back to their community and help individuals with justice involvement. Two of the three sites did not mention any local policies or initiatives as factors in their community.

4. Commonly reported barriers to employment among individuals with justice involvement

Employer biases toward or concerns about hiring individuals with justice involvement, especially those with certain offenses, were the most common barriers to employment cited by the RP program sites visited in early 2022 (17 sites). Some barriers to employment were industry specific, as seven program sites noted that some of the major industries in their area, such as health care (8 sites), information and technology (5 sites), and manufacturing (2 sites) restricted the types of jobs individuals with criminal backgrounds could obtain.

> *"Our background will be our downfall […] A couple jobs I applied for and I was denied because of my background. It's a battle; when you keep getting denied and denied, you don't know where to go. So most people turn to what they know (turning into drug activities, robbing, stealing, things like that). We need to push through that…. There are a lot of people that make mistakes that weren't caught. We paid our dues to society and did our time; why can't we just get another chance?"*
>
> — Program participant on barriers to employment

Six of the 17 sites citing employer biases as barriers to employment specifically described challenges placing individuals with violent offenses in employment. Theft and drug-related charges were also noted as common barriers to employing participants, but restrictions were more common in certain industries like retail (4 sites). Echoing this sentiment, participants from three sites spoke about how their "background" was their biggest barrier, as they felt they had the skills and desire to obtain a job, but when it came time for a background check their offers were rescinded or their employment was terminated. When barriers to employment were due to biases or concerns about an offense type, program staff, such as case managers or job developers, took the opportunity to address them by educating their employer partners on working with reentry populations. For example, staff from two sites described that employer biases toward hiring individuals with certain crimes were due to their lack of knowledge about how cases are charged, so they worked with employers to help them understand. The staff from these sites believed that educating their partners allowed them to feel more comfortable and open to hiring individuals with criminal backgrounds. One of the two sites also described working with the local American Job Center to provide employer partners with education on topics such as fair-chance hiring, the Federal Bonding Program, as well as tax benefits and wage subsidies for hiring individuals with criminal backgrounds.

Other reported barriers to employment included lack of hard skills, stability, and additional life challenges. For example, respondents from five sites noted that although employers say they value soft skills, when it came down to placing participants, what employers really wanted was to hire individuals with high school equivalency and/or certifications that documented their skills. Drug use was mentioned as another common barrier to employment (7 sites). Five sites shared that even in communities where medicinal and recreational marijuana use is legal, employers maintain restrictions against its use. Several program staff also mentioned that lack of stability due to the absence of safe housing, healthy and supportive relationships, and need for mental and substance abuse treatment prevents individuals from obtaining employment (11 sites). Others described logistical challenges such as securing documentation necessary for employment (5 sites) and access to reliable transportation (16 sites)

Restrictions placed on returning citizens by probation and parole as well as limited capacity within probation and parole departments also were also reported to create barriers to serving RP program participants and placing them in employment. For example, staff from four sites shared that the probation and parole restrictions placed on individuals such as limited travel outside of a specific county limited the number of job opportunities for their participants. One of the four sites mentioned that construction jobs may require individuals to exceed the travel radius forcing individuals to miss work or having to find a different job. Staff turnover and shortages within local probation and parole departments limited the ability of officers to oversee their caseloads (2 sites), according to site visit respondents. The program director of one program believed that there were currently about 210 individuals to one officer, making it extremely difficult to coordinate referrals with the department. Staff from the site shared that they typically had to wait about four weeks before receiving a response from a probation officer.

A few sites touched on intersecting challenges faced by specific reentry populations in their communities. For example, reentering young adults face challenges typical of younger populations, due to their limited work experience (2 sites). Respondents indicated that black individuals in some communities face racial profiling from law enforcement, although the nature and extent was not discussed (2 sites). Those with children also face challenges related to accessing affordable childcare and jobs that provide health benefits (1 site).

5. Criminal justice policies in communities with RP grants

Grant recipients shared that policies intended to support justice-involved individuals in their communities often excluded certain individuals or appeared to fall short of their intended outcome. For example, ban-the-box policies were mentioned by 11 of the program sites visited in early 2022, but program staff from three of the sites were unsure of whether the policy facilitated more employment opportunities in their communities as background checks were still required. Staff from one site shared their perception was that the policy did not eliminate a barrier to employment—it only delayed the issue to later in the hiring process. Program staff from three sites shared that the Federal Bonding program worked to incentivize employers into hiring individuals with a criminal background, but that more needed to be done to make employers aware of the program. Additionally, one site noted the bonding program was run by a single-person department, so response times were several days long.

Ban-the-Box policies

Ban-the-box policies are reforms that prohibit employers from asking job candidates questions about their criminal history, such as convictions and prior arrests on initial job applications. However, the policies do not prohibit employers from obtaining an applicant's criminal background at a later time point prior to making a job offer. (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2021)

State policies supporting reentry populations

During virtual visits, two sites shared that in addition to ban-the-box policies, other policies aimed at supporting reentry populations were currently being implemented.

- **California.** An RP grantee located in the state mentioned the Prison to Employment program, a three-year initiative aimed at helping individuals with justice involvement connect to workforce services (similar to WIOA funds but with fewer spending restrictions). However, the program was set to end in March 2022.
- **Missouri.** A grantee shared that the state was doing a better job with granting "good faith waivers." Good faith waivers allow formerly incarcerated individuals the opportunities to pursue a certification in the health care industry where they would have previously been prohibited. A justice system partner found good faith waivers to be beneficial for the reentry population because of the way it opened doors for them to pursue jobs in industries other than transportation, manufacturing, and construction.

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III. Developing Programs for Justice-involved Individuals Through the Reentry Project Grants

Through the RP grants, DOL prioritized the development of programs drawing on "evidence-based and informed interventions or promising practices" to ensure that grantees developed comprehensive programs that fully address the needs of individuals with justice involvement (U.S. DOL 2017). Drawing on the perspectives of grantees included in virtual site visits, as well as responses to the grantee survey, this chapter begins by describing grantees' relevant prior experience and then describes grantees' efforts to plan and design, implement, and operate their grants. Through the site visits, grantees offered their perspectives on factors that they believed facilitated or impeded their efforts to establish their Reentry Project programs. The chapter concludes by offering their insights on perceived successes and challenges.

Key findings[11]

- A recurring grant was reported to afford organizations the opportunity to build off prior successes, solidify services, and maintain partnerships to serve reentry populations in their communities. (III.A.1)
- All grantees had prior experience providing education or training programs and nearly all had prior experience serving reentry populations. (III.A.2)
- Partner input, labor market information, and participant needs were the most common factors the grantees considered when determining service delivery and training strategies to implement. (III.B)
- The intermediary grantees selected subgrantees, specified the service model, oversaw subgrantee performance, and provided technical support as the subgrantees carried out service delivery. (III.C)
- Nearly all grantees employed a project/program director overseeing their grant and a case manager and job coach/job developer/employment specialist on staff to support service delivery. (III.C.5)
- Staff turnover was a common occurrence for grantees but only five sites cited it as a major challenge. (III.C.5)

A. Prior relevant experience

Through the RP grants, grantees often sought to build on their missions and prior experience aligned with helping members of their communities, including those with justice involvement, enter and succeed in fulfilling employment opportunities and careers. Prior relevant experience among grantees included receiving prior DOL grants focused on reentry programming, experience delivering employment and training and workforce development services in their communities, and experience serving individuals with justice involvement through similar or complementary programming.

1. Prior experience implementing DOL-funded reentry programs

Receiving prior reentry-related grants, including REO grants, were described as affording organizations the opportunity to build off prior successes, solidify services, and maintain partnerships to serve reentry populations in their communities. Of the 84 Reentry Project grants awarded in 2018 and 2019, 37 were awarded to an organization with at least one prior DOL reentry grant (for example, Training to Work, Linking Employment Activities Pre-release (LEAP), Pathways to Justice). All but three of these recurring

[11] The location of key findings can be found in the chapter section within parentheses at the end of each point.

recipients provided reentry services in at least one location they served with their previous grant (U.S. DOL 2022b). Of the 27 sites that participated in virtual visits, 15 had received at least one prior DOL reentry grant, and 10 had received at least one RP grant prior to their most recent grant.

During virtual visits, six sites described how their experiences with prior DOL reentry grants informed their existing program services. Four of these six sites noted that the success of their prior grants, the partnerships they established, and the continued need for reentry services influenced their decision to pursue additional funding. For example, one of these sites noted that receiving a couple Reentry Project grants allowed them to create a program that prepared their participants for employment in the health care industry, a prominent industry in their area that is not typically receptive to hiring individuals with a criminal record. Another site described that the success of its Training to Work grant-funded program allowed the organization to develop a positive reputation for serving individuals returning from incarceration, and its partners such as the local American Job Center and the correctional systems, continued to seek them out to provide services after their grant ended. The interest in continuing to serve this population was there, but the site noted that without funding like the RP grant the service offerings might not have been as robust.

Intermediary grantees, in particular, noted some benefits to receiving a prior grant. For example, two of the intermediaries shared that their subgrantees are typically involved in the grant application process, which was helpful since for RP grants, subgrantees needed to be identified prior to the grant award. Additionally, these two intermediaries noted that their subgrantees for RP had already implemented an RP program and were motivated to continue the work. An intermediary that had not received a prior RP grant shared that when they applied for an RP grant, they had to identify their subgrantees in their application. The intermediary noted that for other grants they were able to identify subgrantees after they were awarded. Therefore, for their RP grant-funded program they had to do a lot of initial work to identify subgrantees, determine their fit for the grant, and ensure they were fully on board before submitting their application. However, a subgrantee to this site noted that being part of the application process supported their willingness to fully buy into the program.

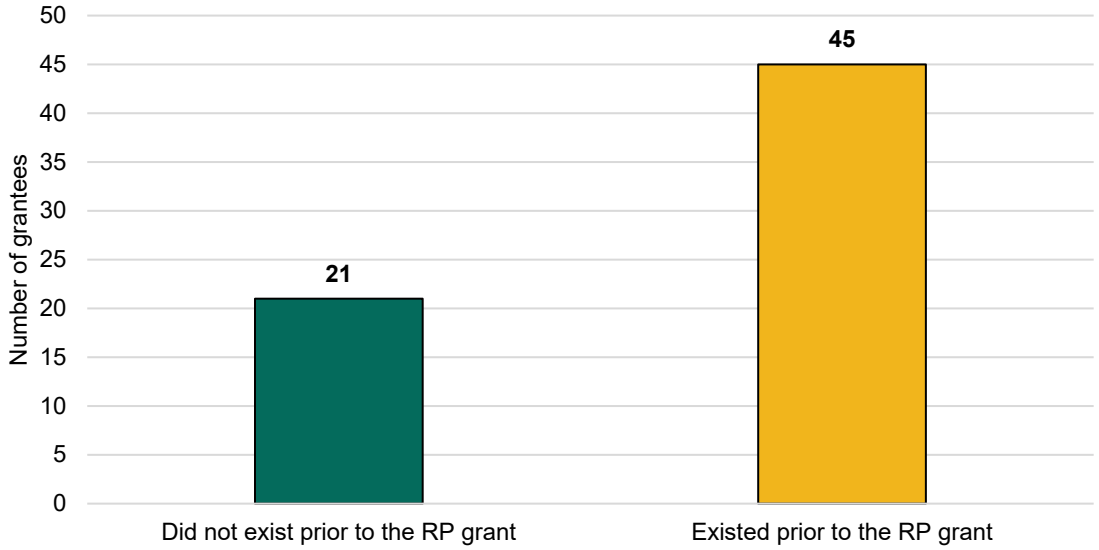
2. Experience working with justice-involved populations and others facing employment barriers

Two of the sites that participated in the virtual visits were not prior recipients of a DOL reentry grant. However, one of the two partnered with an organization that was previously awarded an RP grant, and the partner organization supported the provision of the RP-funded training services. The sites noted that partnering with a prior grantee allowed them to recruit the same employer partners from the previous RP grant. The two sites without a recurring grant did have extensive experience providing services to reentry populations. The site that partnered with a prior grantee, mentioned that the organization had 30 years of experience providing education and employment training to reentry populations in its community, which provided them the ability to develop partnerships with the justice system and participate in a collaborative of organizations working to help men and women transition back into their communities after leaving incarceration. Through their participation in this collaborative, they assigned program participants to a case manager that connected them to services offered by other member organizations of the collaborative. The other site without a recurring grant had 10 years of experience serving reentry populations through state and other grants and was also a member of a collaborative of organizations supporting returning citizens.

All 66 grantees reported in a survey that they had prior experience providing education or training programs and engaging employers in sector strategies. The grantees that responded to the grantee survey

reported having an average of about 23 years providing education or training programs and an average of about 18 years engaging employers in sector strategies. Overall, the majority of grantees' programs (45 programs) existed prior to their receipt of an RP grant while 21 did not exist prior to the RP grant (see Figure III.1).

Figure III.1. Program operations prior to a Reentry Project grant



Source: Responses from grantee surveys administered to 2018 and 2019 grantees (N = 66), from the question asking, "Did [program name] exist in some form before receiving your RP grant funds? That is, did your organization offer the core services offered through the RP grant before receiving the RP grant funds?"

During virtual visits, 11 sites noted that their prior education, training, and sector strategies did not focus specifically on reentry populations, and their initial DOL reentry grant was an opportunity to provide services to those with criminal justice backgrounds. For example, one site noted their organization provided youth with educational and services aimed at improving their "home life." Through this work the organization discovered that several youths and their parents had criminal backgrounds, thus motivating the organization to expand its services to support this need in their community. Another program site described providing employment and training services to its community for more than 50 years. Their experience providing employment and training services included serving those returning from incarceration, which allowed them to develop relationships with the community, justice agencies, and employers, and informed its decision to pursue funding that supported reentry populations specifically.

3. Experience providing other programming that complements RP services

All but five of the of the 66 2018 and 2019 RP CBO grantees that responded to the grantee survey reported having experience providing services to individuals with justice involvement prior to their grant. Those with prior experience serving individuals with justice involvement reported an average of 22.1 years of experience.

Six of the sites that participated in virtual visits mentioned their organization was founded with the intention of supporting those with criminal justice involvement. Additionally, during site visits a few

program sites described providing complementary services to individuals with justice involvement, such as counseling and mentoring (4 sites), other reentry programming (3 sites), and housing (2 sites), in addition to their RP program. One site also shared they provide a prerelease program that prepares individuals for their release from incarceration. Another site described doing state-level advocacy work to address issues around recidivism. Lastly, one site spoke about its violence-prevention program in schools that intended to break the school-to-prison pipeline and increase graduation rates.

B. Developing RP grant applications and planning for implementation

As part of their grant applications, RP grantees developed their initial plans for addressing the needs of young adults or adults with justice system involvement. Through this process, grantees identified their planned service offerings and staffing models, as well as partners that they would engage in to support grant implementation.

Partner input, labor market information, and participant needs were the most common factors the grantees considered when determining service delivery and training strategies to implement. Grantee survey results suggest that workforce development boards (54 percent of grantees), community-based organizations (39 percent), and employer partners (49 percent) typically provided grantees with guidance on program strategies and goals.[12] During virtual visits, seven of the sites shared that their partners played a role in the application and planning phases of their program; however, three mentioned they did not seek the input of their employer partners early on. One of the three sites shared that because the organization had substantial experience doing reentry work, they did not need to involve their partners during the planning process. However, they did continuously seek the input of their partners to inform program improvements so that participants could obtain the skills employers need.

During virtual visits, respondents from seven sites spoke to collaborating with employer partners to identify the mix of services and training strategies to provide RP participants.[13] Similarly, during site visits, the program sites shared that employer input (6 sites) and local labor markets (5 sites) were considered when selecting the sector focus of their RP grant programs. Four sites mentioned soliciting employer input by meeting with employers to gather feedback about the types of skills they look for in candidates so that the program could provide those specific trainings. Three sites described meeting regularly with a collaborative made up of local employers to gather feedback on their program model. The following box details how one grantee specified the roles and responsibilities of the employers that participated in their collaborative.

[12] Includes only grantees with a formal agreement in place with their partner. Of the 66 grantees that responded to the survey question, 35 had a formal agreement with employers, 52 with workforce development boards, and 56 with community-based organizations.

[13] Given the timing of the visits, staff involved in initial RP grant planning and design had often departed their roles. As a result, reflections on the planning process, including employer engagement in service design, are limited.

Defining employer partner roles and responsibilities: Insights from on RP site

During virtual visits, one site detailed the roles and responsibilities of the 12 employer partners that participated in a collaborative, which included:

1. Developing strategies and implementation efforts leading to comprehensive career pathways for program participants
2. Providing periodic feedback and process improvement recommendations leading to improved employment outcomes for program participants
3. Providing on-the-job training opportunities, if available
4. Screening, interviewing, and hiring qualified candidates in employment opportunities, if available
5. Onboarding and providing support to newly hired program candidates

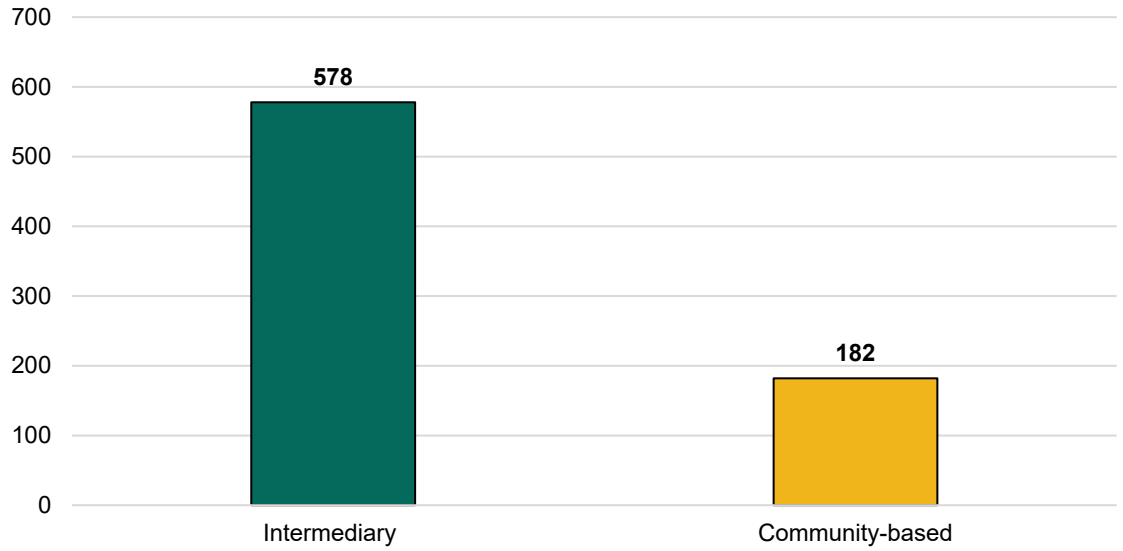
In some instances, employment services were informed by local labor market information (5 sites). One site noted they were familiar with the local labor market and the types of jobs that were in high demand and friendly to hiring individuals with a criminal background, so they decided to tailor their trainings to support those fields. Another site shared that their local workforce development board identified four key sectors in their area, and they selected two of those sectors for their program because they offered entry-level roles for their participants. The other two sectors (health care and technology) were not comfortable hiring individuals with criminal backgrounds.

Supportive services were often informed by the types of supports returning citizens needed in the past, according to site visit respondents but four of the program sites mentioned considering participant needs and preferences when determining the types of job trainings to provide. For example, one site decided to narrow the certifications and trainings they would offer their participants based on the types of trainings participants had committed to and completed in the past. The program director from the site shared they had learned from prior experience that participants often want to build out and grow in a specific area, but they can be overburdened with too much training early on.

C. Operating RP grants

Overall, 16 grants were awarded to intermediaries and 68 were awarded directly to community-based organizations (CBOs) in 2018 and 2019. The intermediary grantees, unlike CBOs, selected subgrantees, specified the service model, oversaw subgrantee performance, and provided technical support as the subgrantees carried out service delivery. Enrollment targets listed in grant applications ranged from 70 to 624 participants. Figure III.2 demonstrates that RP intermediary grantees planned to enroll more participants, on average, than RP community-based grantees.

Figure III.2. Average 2018–2019 Reentry Project grant enrollment targets by organization type



Source: 2018 and 2019 grantee applications (N = 82).

The enrollment targets set by the intermediary grantees ranged from 563 to 624 participants. Only one intermediary grantee set a target higher than 600. Intermediary grantees typically worked with four to six subgrantees (see Table III.1) who were tasked with providing RP-grant funded services, and each subgrantee served roughly the same number of participants as a community-based grantee. The enrollment targets set by the community-based grantees did not vary much as 45 of the 68 planned to serve 188 participants. Seven of the community-based grantees planned to serve fewer than 188 grantees, with the minimum enrollment target being 70 participants. Eighteen of the community-based grantees planned to serve more than 188 participants, with the maximum being 200 participants.

Table III.1. Number of subgrantees per intermediary

	One to three		Four to six		Seven or more		Average number of subgrantees
	Count	Share	Count	Share	Count	Share	
Count of intermediaries	2	13%	12	75%	1	6%	4.4

Source: Responses from 2019 and 2019 intermediary grantees in the grantee survey (N = 16), from the question asking, “What is the total number of RP subgrants your organization awarded for your RP grant?”

1. Identifying subgrantees to participate in RP

As described during virtual site visits, identifying subgrantees entailed internal assessments of regional affiliates of the intermediary to determine fit for the grant based on DOL requirements (4 intermediaries), programming offered by the affiliate (3 intermediaries), past experience working with reentry populations (3 intermediaries), and whether the subgrantees had established partners to support the provision of program services (2 intermediaries). Two intermediaries expressed having difficulty finding subgrantee locations that met DOL's requirements for high crime and poverty. One of the two noted they would have liked to include a subgrantee from a rural location but could not find an affiliate in a rural location that met DOLs high-crime and high-poverty requirements. Another intermediary mentioned that DOLs Federal Poverty Level threshold should adjust for population size, noting that 5 percent of their population represented a vast number of people in need of services.

Geographic requirements

The RP grant funding opportunity announcements defined, high-crime and high-poverty communities as:

- **High poverty: C**ommunities with poverty rates of at least 25 percent as exhibited through the use of American Community Survey data.
- **High crime: C**ommunities with crime rates within the targeted area that are higher than the rate for the overall city (for urban areas) or of non-metropolitan counties in the state (for rural areas).

Although the intermediary ultimately made the decision about which subgrantees to include in the RP grant, three subgrantees shared factors that influenced their decision to participate were whether the RP grant aligned with the subgrantee's organizational mission and values (2 subgrantees), their ability to meet program requirements (3 subgrantees), and their financial capacity to implement the program model specified by the intermediary (1 subgrantee).

2. Providing Reentry Project grant services through subgrantees

Intermediaries described setting forth service delivery models that their subgrantees used to provide similar services to RP participants, regardless of program location. Almost all (14) intermediary grantee respondents to the grantee survey reported that their subgrantees provided a similar service model that was specified by the intermediary. Most of the intermediaries also specified their subgrantees' intake or screening process (13 intermediaries). A little more than half of the intermediaries (10) reported that their subgrantees were part of the same organization.

During virtual site visits, two intermediary grantees shared that they prescribed the service model and delivery processes but allowed their subgrantees to tailor the services based on participant needs and location characteristics. For example, one intermediary shared that all their subgrantees were required to address participant barriers to employment, but how they addressed them was entirely up to them and based on participant needs. However, the soft-skills training was all uniform and the intermediary prescribed certain guidelines that had to be met. In addition to providing services to participants, the intermediaries also shared that the subgrantees were also tasked with entering participant data into a management information system, which was specific to the intermediary organization (3 of the 4 intermediaries included in virtual site visits), and completing quarterly reports (3 of the 4 intermediaries).

3. Coordinating with and managing subgrantees

In addition to prescribing a uniform service model, during virtual visits the intermediaries all described having uniform coordination processes with their subgrantees. Coordination was done through regular check-ins and performance reviews either on a monthly (3 intermediaries) or weekly basis (1 intermediary). Two of the intermediaries noted that their monthly check-ins were done through group meetings with all subgrantees. For one, the rationale for a group meeting was that it fostered learning across the subgrantees on data collection and service delivery as well as competition to meet their enrollment and performance metrics. The other intermediary shared that the convenings were in groups so that all subgrantees could receive the same training and supports. The other intermediary with monthly check-ins mentioned that the check-ins were done individually either via phone or an in-person visit. The intermediary described that these check-in calls were often a follow-up to emails they sent to their grantees to make sure they received the information.

Three of the intermediaries that participated in virtual visits also shared that they were responsible for reviewing their subgrantees' performance and two mentioned adjusting their subgrantees' enrollment targets and funding allocations based on their performance. The two intermediaries that adjusted enrollment targets and funding allocations shared that the targets were mostly adjusted because of subgrantees outperforming others, not necessarily because others were performing poorly. For example, all sites would start with the same enrollment target, but a subgrantee might exceed that target in year one, thus needing more funds to serve those participants. Additionally, the subgrantee that exceeded its enrollment in year one might not be able to sustain that in year 2, which would then result in a decrease in their funding.

Three of the intermediaries also described that part of overseeing subgrantee performance entailed data reviews to ensure they had the proper information for quarterly reports to DOL. One intermediary detailed their process for conducting random audits of their subgrantees' performance reports. The intermediary described that on a given Tuesday, the intermediary's data coordinator would go through and review the data for all new enrollments and then follow up with the subgrantee with any questions about the data or provide the subgrantee with a list of follow-up items to address any potential data issues. The data coordinator would then take all information that is included in the internal data management system and enter relevant data into the DOL system and draft the quarterly performance report.

4. Training and other supports to subgrantees

In addition to providing subgrantees with training on data collection and entry, the intermediaries reported a range of technical assistance they provided their subgrantees to support the implementation of their program services (see Table III.2).

Table III.2. Intermediary provided technical assistance to Reentry Project subgrantees

Activity/service	Grantees	Share
Hiring and retaining staff	15	100%
Working with workforce partners	15	100%
Recruiting and enrolling participants	15	100%
Implementing the program model	15	100%
Generating and using reports for performance management	15	100%

Activity/service	Grantees	Share
Working with other types of partners	14	93%
Conducting follow-up activities	14	93%
Collecting data and obtaining data from partners	14	93%
Planning start-up activities	13	87%
Working with local juvenile and/or criminal justice system partners	13	87%
Retaining participants	13	87%
Working with education partners	12	80%
Providing specific types of direct services	12	80%
Obtaining additional funding to support the program	9	60%

Source: Responses from 2018 and 2019 intermediary grantees in the grantee survey (N = 15) from the question asking, "Does your organization offer technical assistance to subgrantees on the following topics?"

5. Staffing RP grant programs

All program sites employed a project/program director overseeing their grant and a case manager and job coach/job developer/employment specialist on staff to support service delivery. Table III.3 specifies the RP programs' staff compositions and details the average number of staff who held each position and the proportion of staff who worked on RP programs that were part-time. During site visits, some grantees discussed their process for filling RP staff positions. Six grantees shared that they hired new staff to fill positions specific to the RP grant program, while four grantees shared that they leveraged existing staff to work on the RP grant program.

Table III.3. Reentry Project program staff composition, by job position

Position	Count of grantees with at least one on staff	Share of grantees with at least one on staff	Average number per grantee	Proportion of staff who worked on RP part-time
Project/program director	66	100%	1.1	61%
Case manager	64	97%	2.5	27%
Job coach/developer/ employment specialist	56	88%	1.5	54%
secondary education instructor	22	35%	0.4	77%
Vocational training instructor	36	55%	1.7	83%
Mentoring coordinator	23	37%	0.5	62%

Source: Responses from 2018 and 2019 community-based organizations (CBOs) in the grantee survey (N = 66) from the questions asking, "Think about all of the staff who currently work for your RP program, and indicate the number of staff that work in each position." and "Does your [position] work on RP only or do they work on RP and on other projects?"

Note: Percentages were calculated based on the number of grantees that responded to each part of the question.

When asked in the grantee survey about the desired staff characteristics and experience, the grantees reported valuing prior experience working with people with criminal justice involvement (52 percent) and the ability to work effectively (47 percent). However, the other most desired skill for case managers was willingness to be a strong advocate for participants; for employment services staff the other most desired skill was good communication. Although most grantees did not rank prior personal involvement with the

justice system as a top-three desired characteristic, the majority (65 percent) had at least one staff with prior personal justice involvement employed in their program.

During virtual visits, the respondents reflected on staff training opportunities aligned with elements of their service delivery models. To support staff ability to implement program services, 13 of the sites described providing trainings such as trauma informed care (8 sites), motivational interviewing (7 sites), and cognitive/behavior change (2 sites). Chapter V provides further details on how grantees integrated these approaches in their case management models.

Staff turnover was a common occurrence for grantees. During virtual visits 14 grantees described experiencing staff turnover, with five sites citing turnover as a major challenge. For example, one noted that their case managers all left the organization, and they had trouble replacing them due to a low unemployment rate in the area. Therefore, to find qualified candidates they increased the case manager wages. Another site also had trouble replacing departed case managers and mentioned having to leverage case managers from other departments to meet their grant deliverables. One site mentioned losing their recruitment coordinator with a few months left on the grant; they believed this resulted in them not being able to meet their enrollment goal. Lastly, one site shared that their initial employment specialist left, making it difficult to establish relationships with local employers, and eventually the replacement also left, making it difficult to maintain relationships.

IV. Recruitment and Enrollment

Reentry Project grantees sought to serve young adults (ages 18 to 24) or adults (ages 25 and up) with justice system involvement living in high-poverty, high-crime communities (U.S. DOL 2018).[14] To reach this population, RP grantees employed a range of strategies for recruiting, screening, and enrolling individuals in RP-funded services. This chapter describes grantees' approaches for recruiting potential participants, determining their eligibility, and enrolling eligible individuals in RP services. In addition to reflecting on grantees' approaches, this chapter describes who grantees served through the grants. Throughout, the chapter also includes participant and program staff perspectives on the recruitment and enrollment process.

Key findings

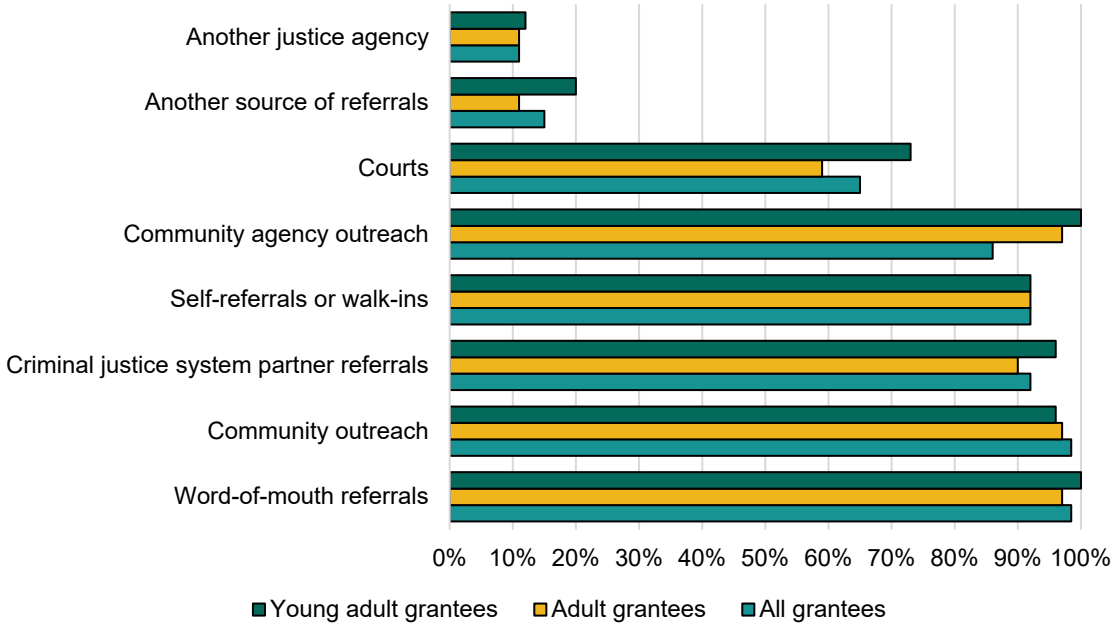
- 17,361 participants were served by 2018 and 2019 grantees. 9,098 participants were served by adult grantees, and 8,263 by young adult grantees. (IV.C)
- Recruitment and enrollment were described as challenging for some of the 2018 and 2019 grantees, especially those serving young adults. Beginning at the onset of the COVID pandemic, as courts closed and began to operate virtually, and as prisons and jails changed exit plans, grantees had a difficult time identifying, recruiting, and enrolling eligible participants. (IV.C)
- Grantees used a variety of screening and intake activities to select participants deemed to be a good fit for RP, in addition to DOL's eligibility criteria. According to the grantee survey, the most common screening activities included interviewing with program staff (95%), completing an application form (94%), and undergoing a criminal record review (83%). (IV.B)
- Many RP participants experienced incarceration due to drug-related charges, according to site visit respondents. Of the 27 sites participating in virtual visits, at least 17 reported drug-related charges as a key factor in participants' criminal history. (IV.B)

A. Engaging potential participants

All grantees worked with one or more referral partners to identify and enroll participants, and many coordinated with a variety of agencies for referrals, per the grantee survey data. The most commonly used recruitment methods among grantees included word-of-mouth referrals from people in the community or former participants (98 percent), community outreach conducted by the grantee served (98 percent), and referrals from probation or parole officers or corrections agencies (92 percent) (Figure IV.1).

[14] As described further below, young adult grantees were able to serve up to 10 percent of participants who were not justice system involved so long as they had dropped out of high school.

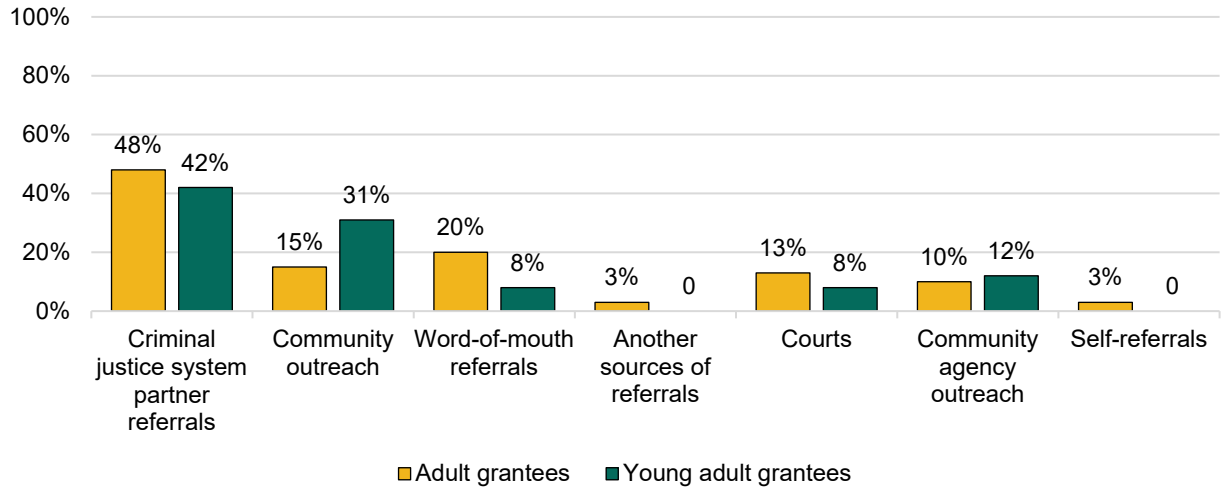
Figure IV.1. Percentage of Reentry Project grantees using each recruitment method, by grant type



Source: Responses from 2018 and 2019 grantee survey (adult grantees N = 40; young adult grantees N = 26) question asking, "Which of the following is a source of referrals to your RP grant program?"

In addition to identifying the recruitment methods they employed to identify potential RP participant, when responding to the grantee survey RP grantees reflected on which methods served as their largest referral source. Although RP grantees used many recruitment methods, RP grantees typically relied on referrals from criminal justice system partners to drive enrollment in their RP programs, regardless of the population being served (Figure IV.2). Although both types of grantees relied primarily on criminal justice system partners for referrals, young adult grantees identified community outreach efforts as their next largest referral source (31 percent), while adult grantees reported word-of-mouth referrals and courts as their largest referral sources (20 and 13 percent, respectively) (Figure IV.2).

Figure IV.2. Percentage of Reentry Project grantees ranking each recruitment method as its largest referral source, by grant type



Source: Responses from grantee survey administered to 2018 and 2019 RP grantees (adult grantees N = 40; young adult grantees N = 26) from questions asking, "Which of the following is a source of referrals to your RP program?" and "Of the referral sources you identified, which has provided the largest number of referrals to your RP program?"

During site visits, grantees offered additional insights on how their programs employed these common outreach and referral strategies:

- **Connecting with criminal justice system partners.** Twenty-four site visit grantees discussed recruitment within criminal justice partners. This often began by developing a relationship with justice staff to convince them of the value of RP. Sites then planned coordination to identify potential participants and to conduct outreach. Coordination with criminal justice partners happened in person (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic), by phone call, text, email, and fax. In some cases, RP staff worked with local jails and prisons to identify eligible individuals for participation post release. RP staff conducted outreach directly within prisons and jails in person as well as through virtual meetings. For example, one site visit grantee conducted prerelease mentoring groups within six correctional facilities and identified individuals for RP service during those group sessions. Staff from two site visit grantees wrote letters to incarcerated individuals to promote the program upon their release.
- **Creating a referral network.** In addition to creating partnerships with criminal justice system partners to conduct outreach, the grantees also established referral networks with these partners. At least nine sites discussed their partnerships with probation and parole staff for specifically for participant referrals. In addition to probation and parole staff, four site visit respondents mentioned receiving referrals from prison and jail staff, and six cited referrals from judges and staff from district courts. At least one grantee noted during the site visits that case managers and recruiting staff had built relationships that led to judges and other court staff making voluntary referrals of potential participants, but also that some judges mandate RP program participation.
- **Participating in community outreach.** Respondents from at least 16 site visit grantees described conducting community outreach to engage potential participants. These grantees used multiple

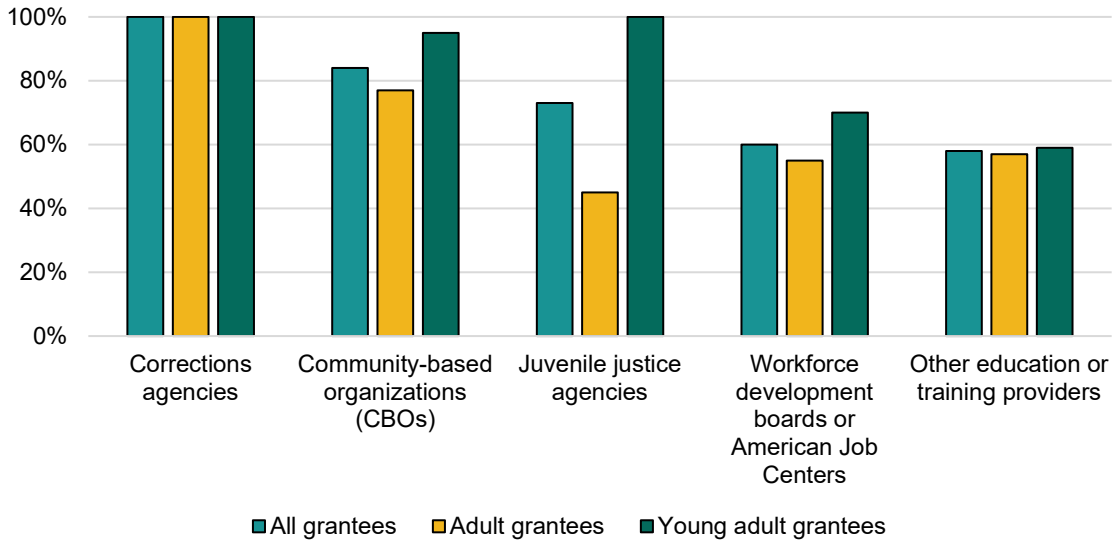
approaches to appeal to as many potential participants as possible. Respondent described attending community meeting and special events, as well as engaging in door-to-door canvassing efforts and visiting community locations like libraries, housing developments, parks, basketball courts, gyms, nail shops, barber shops, and flea markets. For example, frontline staff from one grantee described needing to look outside of traditional outreach methods, leading to them going door-to-door in different neighborhoods to recruit participants. Grantee staff also hosted presentations and events such as job fairs at community colleges and high schools. To complement direct outreach efforts, these grantees frequently advertise to their communities including through newsletters, TV, radio, fliers, and social media channels.

- **Promoting word-of-mouth referrals.** At least 12 site visit grantees highlighted the role of word-of-mouth in recruiting participants. Staff from one site visit grantee discussed the critical role that current participants and program alumni played in recruitment. As one of their case managers noted, one participant referred several other participants to the program and these kinds of referral played a large role in their successful recruitment efforts. Program staff from another grantee reflected that, "After enrolling one participant from the halfway house, a stream of ten referrals followed." During site visits, participants also shared stories of first hearing about their local RP program from friends or family members who had already enrolled in or completed the program.

> *"I just got out of federal prison. A friend of mine just got out, too. He got out a year before me. He would tell me about the program, how good it was, and I had looked into it and then I had signed up for the program."*
>
> — RP participant

RP grantees relied on referral partners to help identify eligible RP participants. The RP grantee survey also reflected that they received referrals from community-based organizations (84 percent) and juvenile justice agencies (73 percent) (Figure IV.3). More than half also received referrals from workforce development boards or American Job Centers (60 percent) and other education or training providers (58 percent). Unsurprisingly, juvenile justice agencies provided referrals to all surveyed young adults grantees. Similarly, all adult grantees received referrals from other corrections agencies, including probation and parole. Figure IV.3 displays the percentage of grantees that indicated receiving participant from referrals from different types of agencies in the grantee survey.

Figure IV.3. Percentage of Reentry Project grantees receiving referrals from each partner type, by grant type



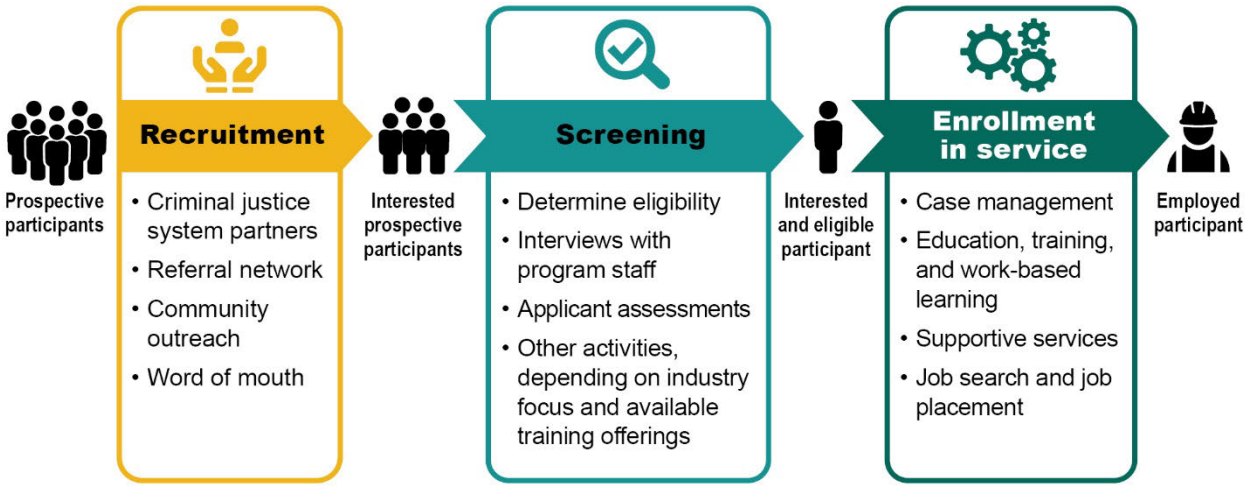
Source: Responses from 2018 and 2019 grantee survey (adult grantees N = 40; young adult grantees N = 26) question asking, "Please indicate which partner/partners provided the following types of program development and support activities for your RP program."

In addition to these common referral sources, during site visits, respondents from seven grantees described receiving referrals from housing facilities, including halfway houses. Participants from these grantees shared during site visits that they first heard about RP from their training providers. For example, one participant shared that he was interested in pursuing his commercial driver's license (CDL) and approached a training provider directly to learn about enrolling. The training provider was a partner with the local RP program and referred him to the program to access services and specifically to cover the cost of the CDL course.

B. Determining eligibility and screening participants

Once participants found their way to the program, grantees determined whether participants were eligible and suitable candidates for the program. This involved screening potential participants to ensure that they met DOL eligibility guidelines, engaging in applicant interviews, assessments, reviews of previous work and education experiences, personal statements, drug testing and other activities. Figure IV.4 presents the typical recruitment, screening, and enrollment process followed by the RP grantees.

Figure IV.4. Typical sequence for linking potential participants to Reentry Project services



Source: Virtual site visits (N = 27).

Each RP grantee needed to ensure that potential participants met DOL's established criteria for young adult and adult participants (U.S. DOL 2018, 2019) before enrolling them in RP-funded services. For both populations, DOL had some common eligibility criteria, such as residing in a low-income geographic area and having never been convicted of a sex crime other than prostitution. Outside of these criteria, DOL created eligibility criteria specific to each of the two populations. These criteria focused on participant age and justice system involvement (Figure IV.5). The 2018 and 2019 young adult grantees had to serve individuals ages 18 to 24, 10 percent of whom did not have to have prior justice system involvement so long as they had dropped out of high school. Adult grantees had to serve individuals 25 years and older all of whom needed to have been justice system involved.

Figure IV.5. Reentry Project young adult and adult program eligibility criteria

Eligibility Criteria	RP Young Adult Program	RP Adult Program
Age	18–24	25 or older
Criminal justice involvement	Currently or previously involved with the justice system (up to 10% of participants may be those who have dropped out of high school without criminal justice involvement)	Previously incarcerated or released from prison or jail within 180 days of enrollment or currently under supervision
Income level	Low-income or residing in a low-income area	
Sex crime conviction	Never convicted of a sex crime other than prostitution	

Source: U.S. DOL 2018, 2019.

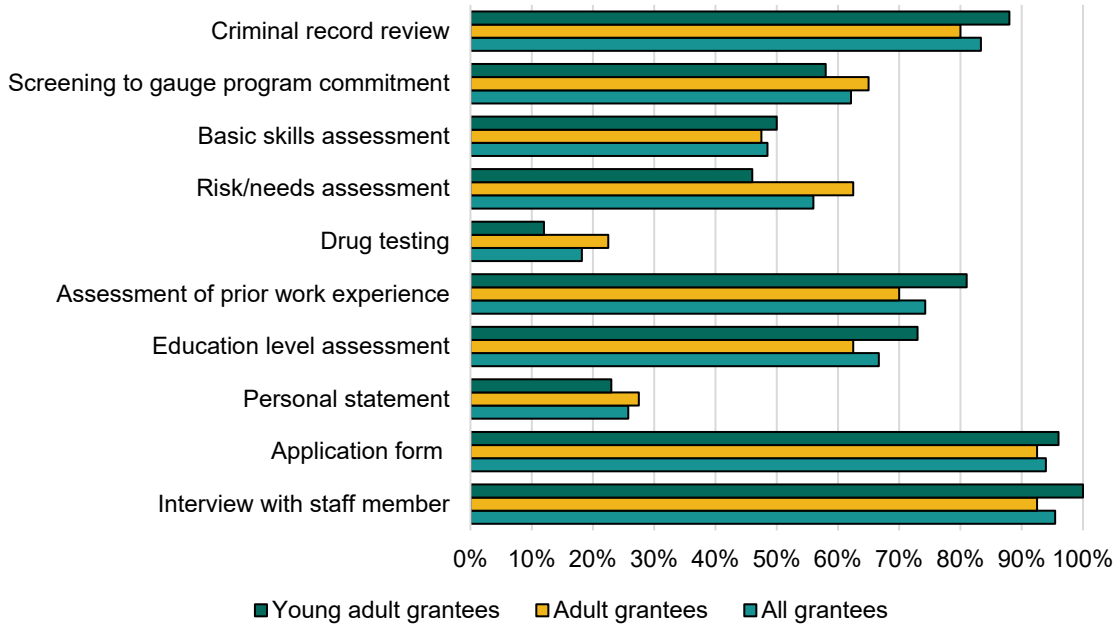
Although RP grantees had the discretion to establish additional eligibility criteria, all grantees included in virtual site visits relied primarily on the criteria established by DOL when determining participant eligibility. Grantees recognized that the eligibility criteria met their needs for the purposes of identifying the appropriate pool of potential participants for RP programming. To operationalize the criteria as outlined by DOL, the grantees reported:

- **Established service areas aligned with enrolling individuals residing in high-poverty, high-crime communities.** To do this, grantees identified zip codes, towns, or counties that potential participants needed to reside in to enroll in services. For example, one young adult grantee focused on serving individuals in four target towns that met DOL's requirements.
- **Verified justice involvement and demographic requirements.** Most grantees (83 percent) conducted a criminal record review to ensure that applicant's criminal history met DOL's eligibility requirements, such as no convictions of a sex crime other than prostitution. Young adult grantees (88 percent) reported conducting criminal record reviews more often than adult grantees (80 percent). In addition to verifying that the applicant met requirements for RP, the criminal record review also helped staff to better understand what types of jobs the person may or may not be able to obtain. During site visits, program staff frequently discussed drug-related convictions as a primary reason that participants had been incarcerated. Of the 27 sites participating in interviews, at least 17 reported that drug-related charges were a key factor in participants' criminal history. According to site visit respondents, other reasons for justice involvement of participants included misdemeanors (such as driving without a license) or more serious offenses (such as theft and violent crimes).

After determining if potential participants met DOL's eligibility criteria for the RP grants, grantees typically then screened potential participants to assess their suitability for their RP-funded services. As identified through the grantee survey, RP 2018 and 2019 grantees reported engaging in a range of screening activities to determine potential participants' suitability for RP programming (Figure IV.4). Common activities included interviewing with program staff (95 percent of grantees), completing application forms (94 percent), and undergoing a criminal record review (83 percent of grantees).

Young adult grantees engaged in more screening activities than adult grantees, based on responses from the grantee survey. In particular, young adult grantees more frequently identified that they assessed potential participants' educations levels and prior work experience than adult grantees. They also more frequently required potential participants to complete interviews and application forms. Adult grantees, however, more frequently conducted risk/needs assessments and used screening procedures to gauge potential participants' commitment to RP programming (Figure IV.6). As reported in the survey, 56 percent grantees that used risk assessments did so to inform screening and service planning. In the grantee survey, grantees most commonly used the risk needs responsivity model, where program services are based on individual assessments measuring the level of risk for future criminal activity (Bonta and Andrews 2007). Among grantees using this tool, 89 percent incorporated it in screening procedures (not shown in figure).

Figure IV.6. Percentage of Reentry Project grantees engaging in each screening activity, by grant type



Source: Responses from 2018 and 2019 grantee survey (adult grantees, N = 40; young adult grantees, N = 26) question asking, "Which of the following are part of your RP application screening process?"

Through virtual site visits, program staff provided further details on why and how they adopted different screening procedures as part of the RP grants.

1. Interviews with program staff

Site visit respondents explained that interviews helped RP staff determine applicants' fit for RP programming. In some cases, applicants met with multiple staff on different occasions for this purpose. Of the sites included in visits, four conducted interviews by a case manager or other staff member to determine whether potential participants were suitable or committed to work and eight sites focused on determining whether participants were willing or prepared to participate in the program. These assessments by staff differed from the formal, existing risk assessments used by grantees and instead relied on staff members to assess whether a participant was prepared for the demands of the program. In addition to these interviews, staff from three sites mentioned that they sometimes exclude applicants that were being reviewed for disability benefits like Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or

"Staff are trained to enroll people that they believe are interested in meeting requirements of program. That means they're interested in workforce training, employment, post-secondary education and not something just looking for help for food this month. No staff person is going to have 100% accuracy when enrolling people and you are going to have some that fall by the wayside, lose interest, and do not want to do any part of the program. We try to avoid that as it won't help us meet our outcomes in proposal."

— RP grantee program staff

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) because the results of those reviews may impact the applicant's preferences and ability to take on certain types of jobs and wages while receiving those benefits.

2. Assessment

As noted in Figure IV.4, most grantees (80%) conducted assessments of prior work experience, which often included an inventory of prior jobs held, types of industries participants had experience with, and average number of years working. Program staff from one site described the purpose of assessing prior work experience as an opportunity to understand interests and transferrable skills. For example, if a person worked in food services in prison, program staff would discuss how the skills the participant developed in that experience could be transferable to warehousing, which pays better. Work experience was reported to vary between young adult and adult participants. During site visits, nine sites serving young adults noted that incoming participants did not have much work experience, whereas adults had varied employment histories. For young adults, site visit respondents offered examples previous experience including jobs in the restaurant (primarily fast food), construction, and warehouse industries. Many of the adult participants had previously worked jobs in manufacturing, warehousing, landscaping, the health industry, call centers, and car washes. Five sites mentioned that participants had previously worked off the record or in illegal activities prior to incarceration. One site also mentioned that adults reentering the community in their forties often had little experience with computers and technology, which created challenges in reentering the workplace.

Basic skills assessments appeared less common among site visit grantees. Respondents from four site visit grantees mentioned using basic skills assessments as part of the initial intake process. Two of these grantees required participants to complete the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) to assess education levels. Another grantee conducted basic skills assessments if participants indicated interest in training options that required substantial math skills. Their case manager noted, "If a training is heavy on math and [a participant] doesn't do well, we bring that to their attention so we're not setting them up for failure."

3. Other screening activities

Depending upon grantees' focal industries and education and training offerings, some grantees conducted additional screening activities to ensure that potential participants could eventually employment in the focal industries. Three sites included in virtual visits described additional screening activities focused on ensuring potential participants could secure employment in focal industries. These activities included:

- **Physical agility testing.** At least one site conducted agility testing as a component during the screening process. According to the site visit respondent, the agility test comprised a mile run, some exercises, and a hike with a life coach. Failure to complete the test was not grounds for rejection from the program but did indicate to the staff that physical fitness was an area for improvement for the applicant, as the goal for participants at this program was to secure an apprenticeship in the construction industry.
- **Drug testing.** At least two site visit grantees described drug testing potential participants. In both cases, positive drug tests did not necessarily exclude participants from RP programming. Rather, the grantees would consider this information when developing service delivery plans. Grantee staff felt that the drug tests helped them understand barriers that participants might face while enrolled in RP.

C. Enrollment outcomes and challenges

1. Enrollment goals

According to WIPS data, over half (56 percent) of the RP grantees met their enrollment goals. A few trends emerged from quantitative and qualitative data. Most notably, as the COVID-19 pandemic began, referral and recruitment mechanisms were limited, as courts and community-based organizations closed, making it challenging for 2018 and 2019 grantees to meet their enrollment targets within their planned periods of performance. As of Quarter (Q) 2 of Program Year (PY) 2021 or December 31, 2021, for 2018 grantees, actual enrollment came in at 104 percent of the goal for adults and 91 percent for young adults. For 2019 grantees, enrollment reached 93 percent of the overall target for adults and 74 percent for young adults.[15] Table IV.1 below shows the progress grantees made toward reaching enrollment goals. As shown, a greater share of 2018 grantees (63 percent) reached enrollment targets compared to 2019 grantees (49 percent).

Table IV.1. Percentage of Reentry Project grantees meeting enrollment goals, by grant year

Percentage of enrollment target met	Percentage of 2018 grantees	Percentage of 2019 grantees
100 percent and above	63%	49%
90–99 percent	16%	12%
75–89 percent	8%	7%
50–74 percent	5%	15%
49 percent and below	8%	17%

Source: Workforce Integrated Performance System data (N = 79), July 1, 2018–December 31, 2021.

Note: Grantees outside of the impact study or that had missing WIPS data were excluded.

Interviews with site respondents confirmed these findings. According to nine site visit respondents, the COVID pandemic impacted their ability to reach their enrollment goals. Of the five sites interviewed that did not meet or foresee meeting their goals, three mentioned the COVID pandemic as a primary reason. More details about grantee perspectives on enrollment challenges are included in the next section of the chapter.

"COVID was the problem all the way as it shut down a lot of the organizations [we] work and partner with…. This impacted everyone's willingness or ability to participate."

— Program staff

[15] Percentages were calculated by taking the total amount of participants grantees reported enrolling in WIPS and dividing it by the grantee total enrollment goal amount for grant type and year.

2. Enrollment and recruitment challenges

Most grantees (69 percent) indicated in the survey that recruiting participants was "somewhat" or "very" challenging. Recruitment was reported to be especially challenging for young adult grantees, with 96 percent of young adult grantees identifying it as "somewhat" or "very challenging." Young adult sites noted some challenges that were specific to working with the young adult population. One site, which had previously held adult RP grants, mentioned that they struggled to reach young adults and found that their typical recruitment activities were ineffective for recruiting young adults. For example, they typically used Facebook for social media recruitment but pivoted to Snapchat and Tik Tok to attempt to reach the age 18 to 24 demographic. Program staff from three young adult sites also noted that there were differences in attitudes and enthusiasm for the program among the young adult population, compared to adults, which made it challenging to recruit young adults to engage in programming.

> *"It is difficult to find interested individuals. For young adults with that profile, that demographic, it is almost like life or death. They either pursue a high school education or you pay the bills. So, the individuals might not have the patience to go through the program."*
>
> — Program staff

Virtual site visits provided further insights on recruitment challenges, with many sites highlighting recruitment challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. At least 13 sites reported that recruitment became challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic due to court closures, restricted contact between referring partners, suspension of community outreach activities, and greater isolation that limited word-of-mouth referrals. During the pandemic, many prisons and jails stopped allowing outside partners into their facilities; at least eight sites mentioned this as a disruption to their recruitment plans, which relied on program staff entering the facilities to hold informational sessions for individuals close to release. Five sites mentioned the closure of courts as a barrier to referral and recruitment. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020, one site visit respondent reported that their ability to connect participants with job placement opportunities decreased, RP staff from the site felt that their failure to meet participants' expectations of job placement affected their reputation to prospective participants, making the program "harder to sell." Additionally, one site visit respondent explained that later in the pandemic, entry-level jobs were offering higher wages due to staff shortages, so many potential participants who wanted or needed to work right away could find entry-level work at higher hourly wages, which may have discouraged people from engaging in RP training.

> *"August–November 2019, we were just starting to get word out in the community, but the pandemic cut off the flow."*
>
> — Program staff

Individual sites noted additional challenges to recruitment. One site described the difficulty of recruiting women for its pre-apprenticeship program in construction. The organization described that construction is still considered a male-dominated industry, and the culture of hazing can be off-putting to prospective women applicants. Another site described difficulties encountered by staff working on recruitment who did not have lived experience in the justice system. They posited that having a recruiter with lived experience would have demonstrated to potential participants that there are people at their organization who understand and can help them. In addition to challenges around having staff with lived experience,

another site described the difficulty of recruiting without a dedicated staff member focused on RP recruitment due to staff turnover.

While the pandemic created recruitment challenges, some sites explored new avenues or technologies for finding participants due to pandemic-necessitated shifts. One site coordinated with jail counselors to set up one-on-one video visits with young adults in custody who are nearing their release date to inform them about the RP program; another site approached local television stations to advertise the program. At least seven sites utilized social media as part of their recruitment strategy, and two sites mentioned that they pivoted to social media after their in-person recruitment methods were limited due to the COVID pandemic.

3. Characteristics of the populations served through the 2018 and 2019 Reentry Project grants

According to the WIPS data, in program years 2018 and 2019, RP grants enrolled a total of 17,361 participants: 9,098 adults and 8,263 young adults. The 2018 grantees enrolled 9,194 participants and 2019 grantees enrolled 8,167 participants.

Table IV.2 lists the sample characteristics of participants at program entrance from program years 2018 to Q2 2021. Only slightly more than one-fifth (22.0%) of RP participants identified as female and more than four-fifths (83.2%) were from racial minority groups (Hispanic; Black, non-Hispanic; or other race, non-Hispanic). More than one-third (35.4%) of participants had not completed high school or a high school equivalent, and a little more than half of participants (56.0%) had completed high school or an equivalent. A larger percentage of young adult grantees identified as female, compared to adult participants (27.0% compared to 17.5%). Additionally, a higher percentage of young adult participants were employed at program entry, compared to adult participants (12.4% compared to 8.5%).

Table IV.2. Sample characteristics of Reentry Project participants at program entrance, program years Q1 2018–Q2 2021

Characteristic	Value (percentage if not otherwise specified)		
	All grantees	Adult grantees	Young adult grantees
Sample size (number of participants)	17,361	9,098	8,263
Age (years)			
19 or younger	13.5%	0.0%	28.5%
20–24	34.1%	0.3%	71.4%
25–29	10.9%	20.6%	0.1%
30–39	19.9%	37.9%	0.0%
40–49	12.9%	24.7%	0.0%
50–59	7.0%	13.2%	0.0%
60–69	1.6%	3.0%	0.0%
70 or older	0.1%	0.2%	0.0%
Female	22.0%	17.5%	27.0%

Characteristic	Value (percentage if not otherwise specified)		
	All grantees	Adult grantees	Young adult grantees
Race and ethnicity			
Hispanic	19.6%	17.0%	22.4%
White, non-Hispanic	16.8%	22.1%	11.0%
Black, non-Hispanic	59.8%	57.3%	62.6%
Other race, non-Hispanic	3.8%	3.6%	4.0%
Education level			
No high school diploma or equivalency certificate	35.4%	24.9%	47.1%
High school equivalent	21.0%	30.9%	10.1%
High school graduate	35.0%	31.2%	39.1%
Some postsecondary education	4.8%	6.5%	2.8%
Certificate	1.5%	2.3%	0.6%
Associate's degree	1.4%	2.5%	0.2%
Bachelor's degree	0.7%	1.3%	0.1%
Advanced degree	0.2%	0.4%	0.0%
Employed at program entry	10.3%	8.5%	12.4%
Eligible veteran	1.5%	2.4%	0.3%
Received needs-related payment	60.4%	62.0%	57.8%
Received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in six months before entry	4.0%	4.7%	3.2%
Received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in six months before entry	24.6%	29.7%	19.3%
Experiencing homelessness at program entry	11.5%	12.7%	10.4%
Disability	6.8%	6.3%	7.4%

Source: Workforce Integrated Performance System data, July 1, 2018–December 31, 2021 (N = 17,361 participants).

Note: Values have been rounded to the nearest decimal point so some subgroups may not total to exactly one hundred percent.

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V. Case Management and Service Planning

Justice involvement can disrupt an individual's career path and well-being, affecting everything from housing to social connections (SAMHSA 2019). This chapter focuses on RP case management and supportive service provision, both of which aimed to help RP participants rebuild their lives. DOL describes these as "fundamental services that are essential in all reentry programs" and required them for all RP programs, although the agency also provided grantees with significant flexibility in how they offered these services so long as they spelled out and justified their plans (U.S. DOL 2018, 2019). Broadly, case managers provided support as participants developed goals, advanced in the program, and sought to meet their basic needs. DOL also intended to fund programs that tailored case management to the specific needs of justice-involved individuals using evidenced-based models. The chapter describes case management staffing structures, how grantees engaged partners in providing case management and supportive services, case management and service planning offered by the grant, and additional services offered to RP participants. It concludes with reported key challenges and recommendations from both program staff and participants.

Key findings

- Case management was an integral component of program service delivery. Ninety-seven percent of surveyed grantees had at least one case manager, with an average of 2.5 case managers per RP program. Interviewed participants and program staff from at least nine virtual visit sites emphasized the importance of the case manager/participant relationship in motivating success. (V.A)
- Despite the prominent role that case managers played, interviewed program staff from at least nine visited sites felt that the labor market made retaining case managers challenging. These sites experienced turnover or difficulty hiring for the position. (V.A)
- Case management included a series of services designed to support participants in becoming self-sufficient, with the most frequently provided services focused on planning. Nearly all grantees used assessments to determine service plans (98 percent of surveyed grantees) and developed individual career or development plans (96 percent of surveyed grantees). Fewer participants received connections to supportive services (33 percent of participants, according to WIPS data). (V.C.3)
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more case management occurred virtually than site visit grantees had originally planned. At least 15 visited sites described offering virtual case management at times. Interviewed program staff noted that this made it more challenging to engage participants and build important connections. (V.C.2)

A. Case management models

Through the RP grants, DOL intended for dedicated case managers to play an important role in programs by acting as "advocates for program participants" (U.S. DOL 2018, 2019) as they navigate the complexities of life outside the justice system. To achieve DOL's vision for case management services, grantees hired case managers to support individuals throughout their enrollment in RP services. As such, 97 percent of grantee survey respondents reported having at least one case manager on their staff and the average number of case managers at each grantee organization was 2.5. DOL did not require any specific number of case managers per grantee, as long as case management services were adequately provided.

1. Case management guidance from intermediary organizations

Intermediary organizations provided their subgrantees with guidance regarding their case management models to promote consistent participant experiences across subgrantee locations. For example, to encourage overall uniformity throughout programming, three visited intermediaries stated that their 10 subgrantee CBOs all followed a standard model of service delivery. To do this, all three sites said that they provided training to subgrantee staff on topics such as case management and provided standardized program forms, such as case file checklists and a case management notes templates. In addition, all three sites held monthly calls with subgrantees to—according to one intermediary—"coordinate consistency." Subgrantees from two intermediaries added that their intermediary offered other check-ins based on program role. This meant that case managers from one subgrantee site could collaborate with case managers from another site and share best practices. The ability to collaborate and meet monthly with intermediary staff was described as "useful."

2. CBO case management models

Despite some standardization in case management approaches across CBO grantees, RP programs described approaching case management based on local context and participant needs. DOL did not require the use of any specific case management model, grantees were required to justify their planned case management to participant ratio for example, there was no specific numerical recommendation from DOL. At least three visited sites indicated that they used a team-based approach to case management. This team approach indicates that participants were often in contact with multiple case managers—one from partner organizations and another from the RP organization. At one visited site, participants could have had contact with up to three case managers, including one case manager from a local American Job Center, one from a training partner, and one from the RP program. The case management approach at these visited sites allowed staff to meet the different participant training or supportive service needs by leveraging the resources or funds that each organization could offer to participants. One site indicated that their partner's funding was much more flexible, and so they worked with the case managers at the partner program to offer the assistance—in this case, housing assistance. Another visited site added that they request that participants sign a release of information so that case managers can more easily coordinate with the partner case management team.

At least six other visited sites indicated that participants worked with a single case manager to develop their individualized service plans. At least one of those visited sites indicated that they matched participants to their case manager based on the participant's personality. Other sites did not indicate explicitly whether they used a single case manager approach. However, one additional visited site reported that they had two separate case manager roles—one role for those who worked exclusively with youth and another for those who worked with adults.

After turnover of program staff at organizations, four visited sites indicated that case management staffing responsibilities and/or structure changed. On the one hand, three visited sites stated that case managers would step in to fulfill responsibilities of vacated roles, such as job developers. On the other hand, at least one visited site explained that when case managers left the organization, other program staff adopted those case manager responsibilities and caseloads. One of those sites distributed the work of what was supposed to be three case managers to one case manager. At least four sites emphasized that vacant positions burdened staff, like case managers, and "presented challenges as staff took on more work and were stretched thinly across multiple programs."

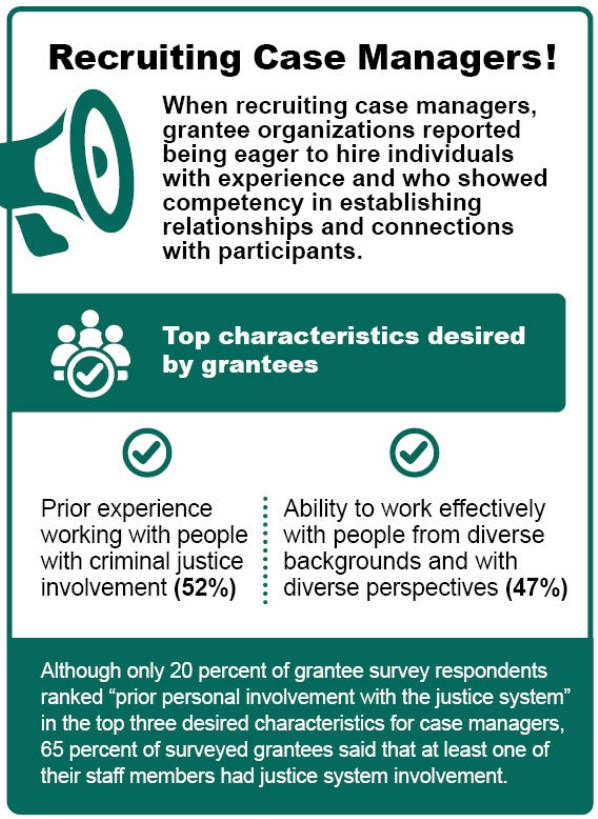
3. Hiring and retaining case managers

Grantee organizations employed individuals as case managers and as reported through the grantee survey often relied on hiring staff to fill case at least one case manager position. Through the grantee survey, RP grantees highlighted the characteristics they most desired when hiring staff for case manager roles (Figure V.1). In particular, 52 percent of grantees sought case managers with prior experience working with people with criminal justice involvement and 47 percent sought case managers that could work effectively with people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

Through virtual visits, grantee staff described their hiring processes in more detail. In practice, at least six sites indicated that they hired participants who had graduated from the program to be case managers and/or hired case managers with prior lived experience with the justice system or other related experiences, such as addiction. An additional three visited sites hired case managers who had previous related experience, such as working with diverse populations in the social work, mental health, and workforce fields.

At least four visited sites noted the advantages of case managers sharing their common lived experience—whether that be with the criminal justice system or sharing the same youth culture—when building connections with RP participants. Similarly, three visited sites indicated that case managers were the most successful when they had lived experience with the justice system and/or education related to the field.

Figure V.1. Desired characteristics among Reentry Project case managers, as reported by Reentry Project grantees



Source: Responses from 2018 and 2019 grantee survey (N = 66) questions asking, "Which of the following characteristics does your organization find most valuable in a RP program case manager" and "What portion of your RP program staff members have been personally involved with the justice system before being employed at your organization?"

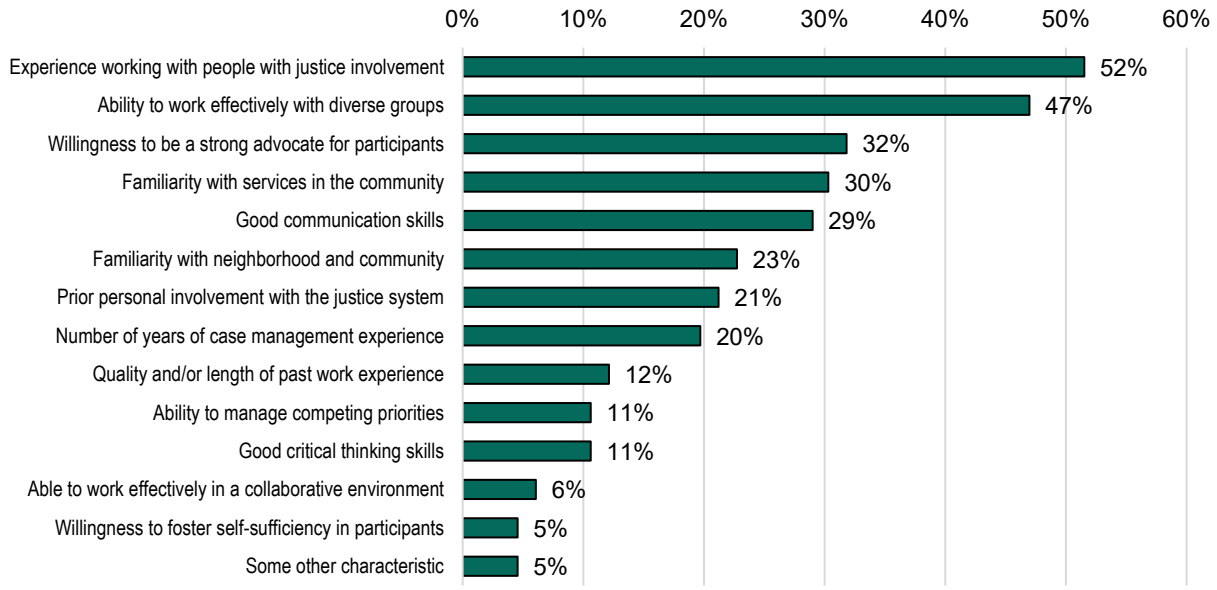
Lived experience among program staff

One case manager had previous lived experiences with incarceration. After incarceration, this individual worked as a peer drug and alcohol counselor. Their unique experience helps them connect to participants and program partners. Partners described this case manager as someone they trusted and as someone who's "institutional knowledge" of the justice system and reentry services made them an important asset in the coordination of reentry services.

In addition to experience working with people with justice involvement and ability to work effectively with diverse groups, grantee survey respondents indicated that other desired qualifications were willingness to be a strong advocate for participants (32 percent), familiarity with services in the community (30 percent), and good communication skills (29 percent) (Figure V.2). At least 15 interviewed

participants cited that staff advocacy and support as the element of programming they liked the most. One participant said the staff always "had [their] best interest in mind," while another echoed the sentiment explaining that the program listened to what their personal goals were and did not force any goals onto them.

Figure V.2. Percentage of Reentry Project grantees ranking characteristic in top three of importance for case manager



Source: Responses from 2018 and 2019 grantee survey (N = 66) question asking, "Which of the following characteristics does your organization find most valuable in a RP program case manager?"

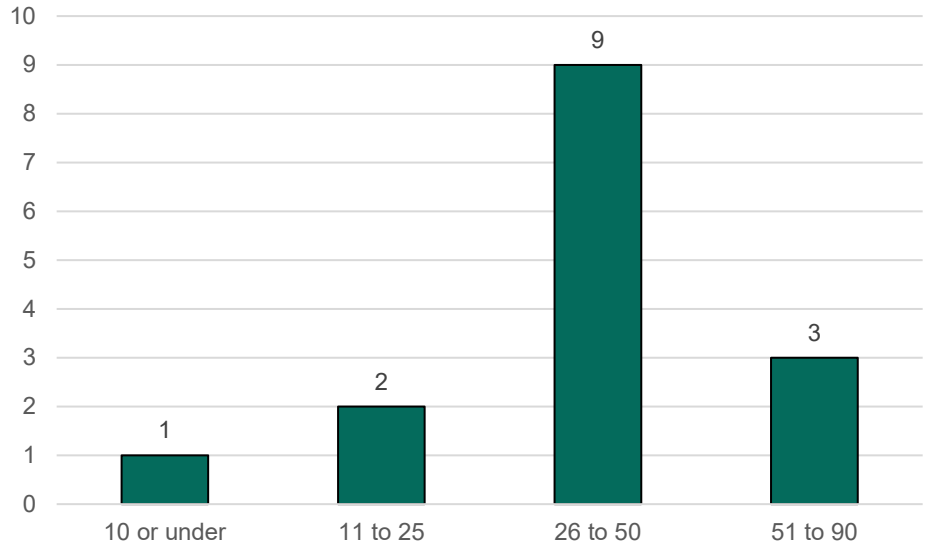
Note: Grantees ranked the top three characteristics that mattered most to them among case managers.

During the planning period for the RP grants, the visited sites hired new staff and used existing staff as RP case managers. At least 7 visited sites reported that they hired case managers from within their organization to work on the program. Ten other visited sites stated that they hired from outside the organization to work on the program but experienced challenges finding candidates with the desired qualifications (as described in the following section). In addition, 2 visited sites stated that they hired from both within their organization as well as from outside. At least 22 visited sites described funding one or more of their case managers, whether existing or newly hired staff, through RP grant funds. Based on the site visit and grantee survey data, sites recruited from a wide pool of candidates. However, grantee hiring practices suggest that they recognized the value individuals with personal lived experience brought to the case management roles.

Once in their positions, caseloads and hours worked on RP programs varied across visited sites, according to site visit respondents. As illustrated in Figure V.3, the most common caseload was between 26 and 50 active participants per case manager, with program staff from 9 sites describing their caseloads in this

range. However, caseload size varied, with the 15 sites that clearly indicated their caseload size describing caseloads as small as about 10 to as large as 90 active participants per case manager.[16]

Figure V.3. Number of virtual visit grantees indicating caseload size, per case manager, in each category



Source: Virtual site visits (N = 15).

Note: One site did not provide an estimated caseload during site visit interviews.

Staff from four sites noted that their actual caseload was larger than planned due to staff turnover and challenges hiring replacements (see "Hiring and retaining case managers" for more details). In one interviewed site, program staff did not have individual caseloads but were instead evaluated jointly on all participants. For this grantee, each case manager focused on a specific industry with cases separated by those industries—health care and manufacturing. Most case managers worked full-time, but 31 percent of case manager staff at grantee organizations worked part-time on their RP program.

The case manager role experienced challenges in recruitment and retention. While recruiting, seven visited sites experienced challenges in finding qualified candidates to fill vacant case manager roles due to noncompetitive salaries (three virtual visit sites) and/or an unqualified applicant pool (four virtual visit sites). Visited sites considered strategies such as "splitting the [case manager position] into two roles and dividing job responsibilities" and increasing case manager wages as potential hiring strategies. For example, at one of the visited sites, the case manager role was responsible for outreach, placement, training, and employment; this site considered narrowing the case manager's focus to make the position more appealing and manageable because they had had "five individuals who left the [case manager] position" since the beginning of their RP program.

[16] While grantees were asked to identify and provide justifications for the ratio of case managers to participants in their grant applications, the FOA did not prescribe a particular case management model that grantees were required to adhere to or a specific number of case managers they needed to have.

This challenge occurred throughout the grant period as virtual visit sites faced turnover in the case management role. At least nine visited sites identified turnover as an issue within their case management staff team, and one of those sites mentioned that, in general, staff retention was particularly difficult among staff who provide service directly to participants—such as case managers. Retention was difficult for several reasons. Those sites cited the pandemic, noncompetitive salaries, and burnout as common reasons why case management staff turned over so often.

> *"You're not going to retain folks with $40,000/year."*
>
> — Program staff

One site referred to an initial excitement when staff were onboarded, but that quickly faded, and the employees found the work was "too much for them in practice." Another site added that "general burnout can be common in their field." The pandemic affected turnover because, as one site stated, it generated additional burnout and compelled others to leave to manage other responsibilities, such as the health of family members.

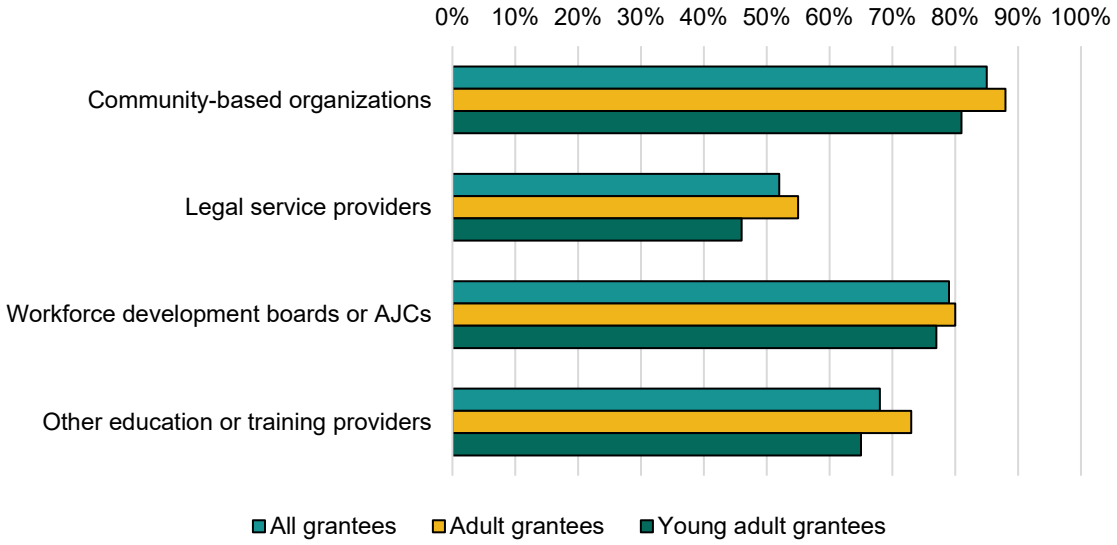
Turnover at other positions across grantee organizations was reported to create spillover effects on case manager roles. As positions became open, case managers at three visited sites were promoted within the organization to fill other roles, thereby leaving the case manager positions vacant. Two visited sites described internal promotions as "fairly common" when they received another grant—which reduced overall organizational churn—but it would "take time to fill their roles on the RP grant."

With respect to turnover, one visited site emphasized that the "benefit of consistency is incalculable*"* and added that when you have to train new staff, the program can get behind very quickly because participant training will slow down, which can lead to "dropouts." Two other sites that experienced severe turnover added that when staff turnover is present, the effects are "hard on staff as they [lose] the support structure of their coworkers to rely on."

B. Engaging partners in addressing barriers to employment

Grantees often sought to collaborate with their partners to help address participants' barriers to employment, ensure participants successfully completed training, and support participants' efforts to maintain stable employment. Supporting these partnership objectives required grantees to identify and engage appropriate partners who could offer participants complementary services, per site visit respondents. As described in their grant applications, RP grantees frequently partnered with local American Job Centers, corrections and rehabilitation departments, building councils, legal aid organizations, churches, health care providers, local nonprofit organizations, community colleges, probation and parole officers, and treatment facilities. Despite the prevalence of these partnerships, as identified in grant applications and through virtual site visits, RP grantees varied in the extent to which they established formal agreements to connect participants with partner-provided supportive services (Figure V.4). Adult grantees reported more frequently establishing formal agreements to connect participants to supportive services than did youth grantees.

Figure V.4. Percentage of Reentry Project grantees that established formal agreements with partner programs, by grant type



Source: Responses from 2018 and 2019 grantee survey (adult grantees, N = 40; young adult grantees, N = 26) question asking, "Does your organization have formal agreements, also known as partnerships, with any of the following partner types?"

AJC = American Job Center.

Through site visits, grantees and their partners discussed their efforts to collaboratively support RP program participants. To accomplish their goals for participants, partners included in site visits helped to coordinate parallel case management (5 sites) and offered supportive services, such as mentoring services (6 sites), legal aid services (22 sites), food assistance (4 sites), housing assistance (18 sites), child care (8 sites), physical and mental health or substance use disorder support (11 sites), and provided other supports, such as access to technology (2 sites) and tutoring (5 sites).

Common grant partners, as identified during site visits, included:

- **American Job Centers (AJCs)** offered additional employment and training services, such as resume workshops, career coaching, case management, job search assistance, and paid on-the-job training (OJT) through which programs were able to leverage WIOA and other flexible funding sources, such as California's Prison to Employment initiative that provided $37 million over three years to fund "the integration of workforce and reentry services through grants to workforce service providers" beginning in 2017 (CWDB n.d.).
- **Legal aid organizations** provided no-cost consultations to RP participants from 22 sites to resolve such issues as expungement, securing driver's licenses and other forms of documentation, and creating or modifying child support orders.
- **Health care providers or addiction treatment facilities** worked with 11 site visit grantees to help address the health care and substance abuse needs of participants, including family health centers that offer Medicare enrollment and other physical and mental health services.

- **Local nongovernment organizations** such as churches and food banks partnered with at least 12 site visit grantees to provide supportive services by providing food, mentoring services, child care, transportation, or housing assistance.
- **State and community corrections departments** and the parole and probation officers that work there partnered with at least six site visit grantees and coordinated additional support in navigating reentry services; in one case, this included hosting peer support groups.
- **Local building trades council.** One site visit grantee worked with the local building trades council to offer parallel case management. A case manager from the building trades council helped to transition RP graduates from pre-apprenticeship to apprenticeship placement in partnership with the RP case manager.

At least 25 sites indicated that they referred participants to program partners to cover supportive service needs described above as well as in more detail below in Section D. There was little uniformity on how program staff followed up on the referrals they made, but seven of those sites stated that they maintained regular communication with their partners ranging from weekly to bi-monthly meetings, and at least five sites stated that they did follow-up with participants and/or partners to ensure that services were delivered. One site stated that "*an important aspect of building and growing these partnerships has been keeping all partners updated about what is going on with the program and in the loop about any changes, regularly communicating*."

Partner-coordinated resource fairs

One visited site partner helped to coordinate resource fairs for recently released individuals to help connect them with services in the community, such as legal aid. This partner also hosts a monthly "Lifer's Meeting," where individuals being released after life charges are introduced to others who are going through and have gone through the experience of "reintegrating" into their communities.

Four visited sites mentioned partner roundtables/coalitions as an effective way of bringing together agencies for collaboration. The roundtables allowed local organizations and justice partners to stay abreast of program updates or other new and to share resources so that everyone could provide referrals to one another for the benefit of participants.

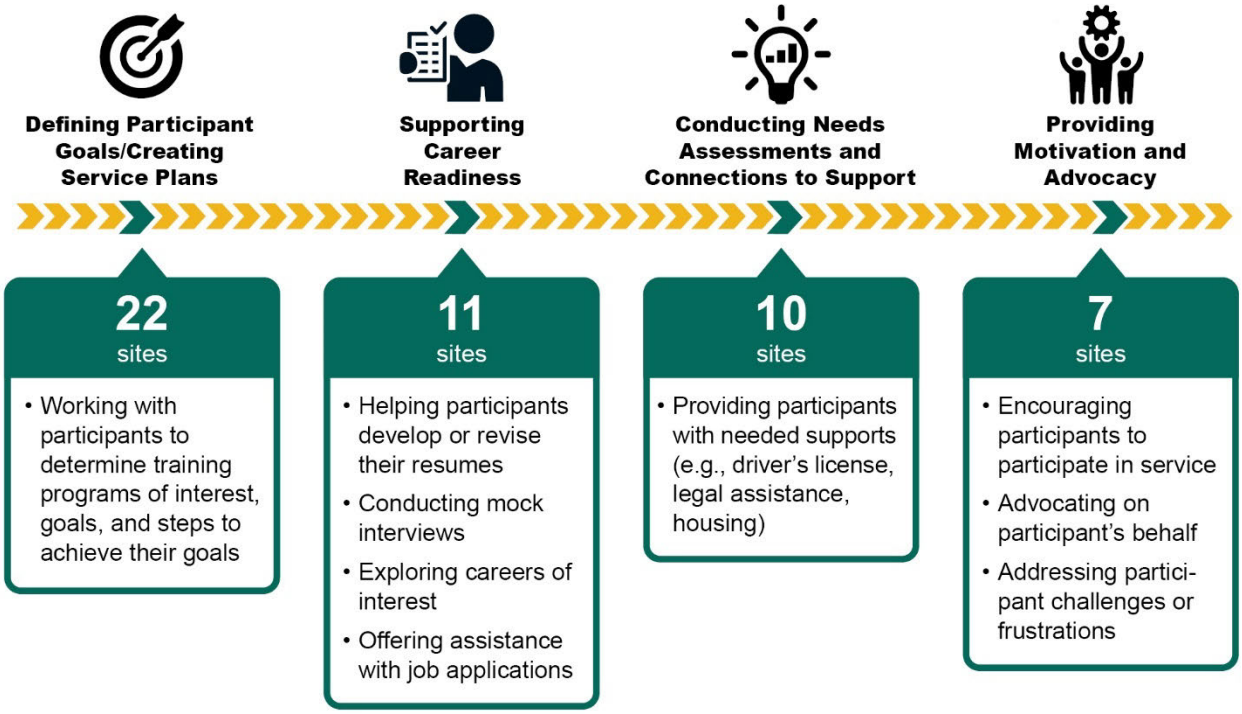
C. Supporting participants through case management and service planning

Through site visits, RP grantees and their staff described their approaches for supporting participants through case management and service planning. As described during these interviews, RP grantees defined their visions for case management services. Based on their vision and goals, grantees adopted different approaches for providing these services. Site visit interviews also provided an opportunity to hear directly from participants regarding the extent to which case management services met their needs and helped them achieve their goals.

1. Goals of case management services

Across the sites that participated in virtual visits, program staff identified numerous intentions and motivations for case management. As illustrated in Figure V.5, program staff from visited sites identified common goals for case management services.

Figure V.5. Case management goals as identified by site visit respondents



Source: Virtual site visits (N = 27).

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive and individual sites may have identified more than one goal.

When identifying these goals, virtual site visit respondents identified how they worked to achieve each goal:

- **Defining participants goals and creating service plans** (22 sites). This involved conversations and assessments to help participants determine both their next steps in the programs (such as choosing a training program) and longer-term goals, as well as laying out the steps to achieve them.
- **Supporting career readiness** (11 sites). This included assessments and conversations designed to identify promising career paths, help participants develop or revise their resumes, engage in mock interviews, and provide assistance applying for jobs.
- **Conducting needs assessments and connections to support** (10 sites). This included conversations or formal assessments to determine what supports participants might need to be successful in the program, such as obtaining housing, a driver's license, mental health counseling, or legal assistance. According to program staff interviewed during virtual visits, case management activities (conducting needs assessments, providing connections to support, and advocating for participants) were often key to participants' well-being even if less directly connected to achieving employment. For example, one program staff observed that a participant did not have a doorknob in their home, so he had it replaced so that the participant could regain a sense of security and privacy.
- **Providing motivation and advocacy** (7 sites). This involved conversations and support to encourage participants to participate in services, as well as advocacy on their behalf. For example, some case managers spoke with participants to help them plan and address emerging setbacks.

Outside of their overarching goals for case management services, program staff described relationship building as an important component of case management. Across sites, interviewed program staff described how they interacted with participants, with at least 11 sites emphasizing the need to develop positive relationships with trust, respect, and viewing participants through a strengths-based lens. Staff from these 11 sites noted that creating this sort of relationship takes time and a willingness to share from both sides. As described by staff from at least four sites, shared lived experience with the justice system facilitated relationship building. Program staff from five sites also emphasized the importance of individualizing case management so that it is tailored to each participant's needs. One site described using more of a rules-focused approach, with a program staff saying they were a "stickler" for program rules and willing to remove someone from the program if necessary.

> *"I see it like having dinner with somebody so I know what the next date will be like. It's a conversation, not an interrogation. I'll be the person they will come to with their needs."*
>
> — Case manager

2. Delivering case management services

When designing their service delivery models, grantees established norms for case management services, including frequency of contact with participants, methods of contact, and service delivery locations. As discussed during site visits, the COVID-19 pandemic often reshaped the delivery of case management services, with in-person contact shifting to virtual interactions.

Connecting with RP participants. Site visit respondents noted that their programs often established minimum requirements for regularly connecting with RP participants. RP grantees required anywhere from as frequently as weekly (11 sites) to as seldom as monthly (8 sites). Although grantees established standards to ensure that all participants received a baseline level of case management contact, frontline staff from 10 site visit grantees described being in more frequent connect with participants than required by their programs. Frequency of contact also varied over the course of program enrollment for at least 7 visited sites, with more frequent check-ins common at the beginning of the program and tapering off as participants were engaged in training or with employment.

> *"That 30-day rule is to say you should not let 30 days go by without being in touch with your participants, it is not suggesting you should only be in touch once every 30 days."*
>
> — Case manager

Although RP grantees established standards for case management services when designing their models, as described by site visit respondents, the COVID pandemic reshaped the provision of case management services. In light of the pandemic, most RP grantees described shifting to virtual services, leading to changes in how they established and maintained contact with RP participants.

- **In response to the COVID pandemic, case management sessions and interactions moved to a virtual format,** with program staff from at least 19 visited sites shifting to virtual sessions as their main mode of contact with RP participants. At least 14 of these sites only offered virtual case management during peak moments of the pandemic.
- **Virtual contact happened by telephone, email, and text, as well as through online video calling platforms like Zoom and social media like Facebook Messenger.** Program staff from at least 11

sites noted that participants often lost cell phone service or changed their phone numbers, which created challenges for sustained virtual engagement.

- **Despite the pandemic, at least 11 visited sites also provided participants with options for in-person case management services.** In-person contact occurred at grantee locations, in participants' homes, or in public locations like McDonald's or a mall. Staff from these 11 sites considered participant comfort and safety when meeting in person, such as choosing a different location if a grantee was in an area with gang activity.

3. Case management activities

To meet the case management goals outlined above, RP grantees provided multiple case management activities from the point of program enrollment through program exit.

Building participant confidence through early case management

During the first 30 days of services, one site sets up small tasks for participants to help them gain confidence. For example, tasks included learning how to use DMV kiosks, accessing the digital platforms where trainings are hosted, and writing and sending emails. An interviewed program staff member explained that these "building blocks" help participants move from achieving small to larger goals.

a. Initial intake helped build rapport

According to program staff from at least 10 interviewed sites, case management began upon program enrollments. According to respondents from these sites, first sessions focused building rapport with participants and learning about their goals. During these sessions, case managers often worked with participants to develop service- and career-planning documents. If applicable, case managers reviewed results from assessments completed as part of the eligibility process (see Chapter IV for more details).

b. Service-planning assessments were used to match participants with services in different categories

As described by site visit respondents, the groundwork for case managers' ongoing efforts to support participant success began with assessing participants' needs and developing plans to meet them. To that end, most grantees (98 percent of surveyed grantees) conducted career assessments or used interest inventories with participants to begin service planning. In addition to working with participants to understand their career interest, grantees employed risk assessments to further inform case managers' service-planning efforts. Grantees used risk assessments during initial intake. Surveyed grantees most often used Risks Needs Responsivity (56 percent of grantees), followed by Resource Allocation and Service Matching (44 percent of grantees), and Integrated Risk and Employment Strategy (39 percent of grantees). Among grantees using these tools, more than 85 percent used each tool to inform service planning.

Site visit respondents from four grantees mentioned that these assessments were to determine the presenting needs of potential participants and whether they would benefit from the services provided by the RP program. Program staff from one intermediary noted that they used a risk assessment prior to enrollment but that "there is no reason why an affiliate would not be able to serve an individual based on the risk assessment. It is more based on the appropriateness of the program for a particular individual." On the other hand, another site noted that if an applicant's risk assessment indicated that they were at low risk for recidivism, they would refer the individual out to a partner for services because they wanted to focus on serving individuals most in need of services with their resources. At least four sites noted that if

the risk assessment indicated that the applicant was experiencing substance use disorder, they would refer the participant to treatment rather than enrolling them into the program.

When used for service planning, case managers noted that assessments helped them participants' next steps in the program and identify long-term goals. Case managers documented these goals in Individualized Development Plans (IDPs) or service plans.

Site visit respondents provide further insights on how assessments informed case managers' approaches for service planning:

- **Academic or basic skills assessments** (at least 15 sites), like the TABE, STAR, or LASS, allowed sites to assess literacy, numeracy, and/or readiness for training. One site mentioned that some participants were unfamiliar with very basic skills like the days of the week or months of the year, so they used a skills assessment to make sure they were uncovering and addressing those needs.
- **Career assessments and interest inventories** (at least 12 sites) like Occupational Information Network (O*NET) or the Barriers to Employment Success Inventory (BESI) to identify jobs and careers that might be a good fit for the participant.
- **Risk or criminogenic assessments** (at least 10 sites) such as Ohio Risk Assessment System or the Level of Service/Case Management Inventory can be used to determine participant service and support needs. Two sites divided participants into higher and lower risks groups based on these assessments and sometimes provided these groups with different services.

> *"I feel like a comprehensive assessment on intake lets us know what challenges and needs are."*
>
> — Program staff

Program staff from at least five visited sites felt positively about using assessments to better understand participant needs. One program staff person highlighted that using multiple assessments helped them develop a complete picture of the participant, from career interests to the issues they were facing. A group of four intermediary sites who participated in virtual visits used a similar series of assessments that included the O*NET career interest inventory, BESI, and a risk assessment. However, a program staff person from one site questioned whether assessments were worth the time and felt questions about adverse childhood experiences in one needs assessment might be retraumatizing.

c. Service planning documents and connections to services linked participants to what they need

Individualized Career Plans (ICPs) or IDPs provided participants with an outline for how RP services would be tailored to address their needs, as identified through their initial meetings with their case managers. Almost all grantees sought to create participant ICPs or IDPs as a service (96 percent of surveyed grantees). In addition, WIPS data indicate that about 80 percent of adult grantee participants and about 45 percent of young adult grantee participants received individualized career services, which include the development of an Individual Employment Plan (in addition to assessments and other services).

Program staff from at least 22 visited sites discussed their career or development plan process, which they explained helped participants define their goals and determine which services they wanted or needed (training, education, or supportive services). Case managers developed these plans early and checked in on them with the participant periodically to see progress and to ensure that goals continued to align with

program requirements. One program staff member noted a desire that their ICP template had more space for intermediate milestones so that participants could better mark their progress along the way.

Another component of case management included referring participants to the services that their employment plans outline as necessary, including education and training programs and supportive services. Interviewed program staff and participants identified the following as key needs: housing (at least 25 sites), legal services (at least 24 sites), transportation (at least 24 sites), mental health services (at least 14 sites), and substance use disorder support (at least 13 sites). These services were provided both in house and by partners. See Section D of this chapter for details about connections to supportive services and Chapters VI and VII for connections to education/training and employment services.

d. Ongoing support and follow up case management offered continuity

Through the FOA, DOL emphasized that case management "must begin at the time of enrollment and continue throughout the participant's participation in the program, including the follow-up period" (U.S. DOL 2018). At least ten case managers interviewed during site visits noted that they worked with participants throughout their time in the program. After establishing initial service plans and connecting participants to services, they performed additional check-ins focused on a variety of topics, including:

- Progress toward goals
- Conflict resolution and challenges with relationships
- Resume building and job applications
- Employment issues (such as wanting to change jobs)
- Meeting continuing needs (such as for housing)

In addition to providing the above services, at least seven sites also highlighted that case managers offer less tangible, ongoing emotional support and motivation. One interviewed participant explained that "*the family vibe is the thing that helped me the most.*"

Additionally, nearly all surveyed grantees indicated that participants had access to some form of case management after program exit (98 percent), with more than 75 percent of surveyed grantees also providing referrals to support groups facilitated by the grantee organization, assistance planning and implementing their next career steps, and/or assistance in securing better-paying jobs after program exit. During the visits, program staff from at least seven sites also described case management check-ins that continued even after participants found employment—most often phone calls or other quick virtual meetings to make sure the participant did not have unmet needs. Typically, these interactions occurred less frequently than during the program.

e. Tracking and coordinating services

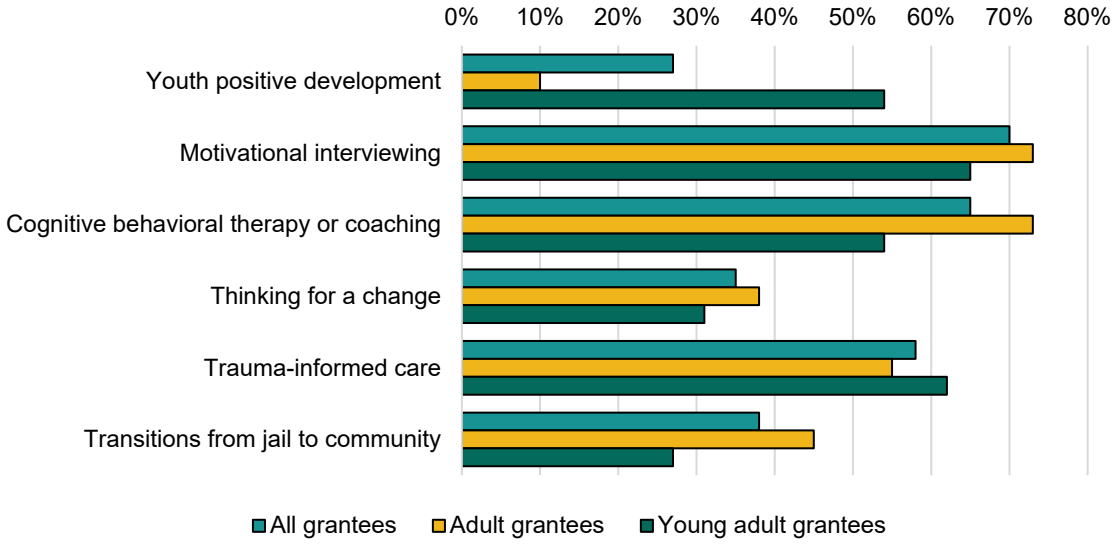
All sites that participated in a virtual site visit used various Management Information Systems (MIS) to track case management services, including Apricot, Efforts to Outcome, SalesForce, QuickBooks, and Google databases. Databases typically included case notes that indicated what was discussed as well as details about which services were accessed. Eight sites also used their database to track participant referrals to partner organizations. Typically, case managers entered the data, but at least one site had an MIS coordinator with this responsibility. One program staff member noted that all RP staff at their organization had access to their MIS, including entries about all individual participants. The staff member

explained that this was a particularly important practice in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, when staff often worked remotely and were less able to share information about participants more informally.

4. Using specialized approaches

Though DOL provided grantees with significant flexibility in shaping their case management approach, the FOA did require that all grantees "identify and justify…evidence-informed types of case management services and/or activities" (U.S. DOL 2018, 2019). Through the grantee survey, grantees indicated using a variety of specialized approaches for case management to address the needs of RP participants (Figure V.6). Reflecting the differences in the needs of populations served through the adult and young adult grants, adult and young adult grantees reported embedding different specialized approaches in their case management models. Unsurprisingly, more than half of the young adult grantees (54 percent) reported integrating youth positive development in their case management models compared to 10 percent of adult grantees. Similarly, almost half of the adult grantees (45 percent) indicated that they focused on transitions from jail to community in their case management models compared to only 27 percent of young adult grantees. This could reflect the different types of prior justice involvement among adult and young adult participants.

Figure V.6. Percentage of Reentry Project grantees using specialized approaches for case management, by grant type



Source: Responses from grantee survey administered to 2018 and 2019 RP grantees (adult grantees, N = 40; young adult grantees, N = 26) from question asking, "Which of the following case management models are used in your RP program?

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive so individual grantees may have selected more than one case management model.

Most grantees (at least 22 visited sites) incorporated specialized, evidence-based case management approaches tailored to their participants' needs. Some of these approaches are specifically designed for those with experience in the justice system, while others more broadly target individuals who have experienced trauma or otherwise need additional support to achieve self-sufficiency and well-being. According to the grantee survey, grantees most often used motivational interviewing (70 percent), cognitive behavioral therapy or coaching (65 percent), and trauma-informed care (58 percent) as case

management approaches. More than half of the grantees implemented at least one of these three models or approaches.

Sites that participated in a virtual visit also identified motivational interviewing and cognitive behavioral therapy as the two most used approaches, with at least 16 sites using cognitive behavioral therapy and at least 12 using motivational interviewing. However, only four sites specifically mentioned using trauma-informed care.

Most used case management models by surveyed grantees

- **Motivational interviewing** is "a collaborative, person-centered form of guiding to elicit and strengthen motivation for change" (Miller and Rollnick 2009).
- **Cognitive behavioral therapy** is "a treatment that focuses on patterns of thinking and the beliefs, attitudes and values that underlie thinking" (National Institute of Justice 2010).
- **Trauma-informed care** is "an approach used to engage people with histories of trauma [that] recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role that trauma can play in people's lives" (SAMHSA 2022).

Sites took a range of approaches to incorporating specialized case management models, such as beginning programming with a formal intervention based on cognitive behavioral therapy, incorporating motivational interviewing into individual goal-setting sessions with participants and connecting participants to a counselor qualified to conduct cognitive behavioral therapy. One site included elements of cognitive behavioral therapy, such as anger management and talking about feelings and emotions, into a role play during its job readiness class.

Spotlight on cognitive behavioral therapy

Of the at least 16 visited sites that used cognitive behavioral therapy, 14 noted using the strategy formally, with trained staff and/or a specific activity or strategy based on this method. For example, one visited site used an intervention called "Getting Ready for Work." It involved curriculum from the University of Cincinnati that covers topics like problem solving and feelings at work. At least 4 interviewed sites formally train their staff in the Thinking for Change Model, which is based on cognitive behavioral therapy and targeted for those with justice involvement.

Intermediaries also created specific approaches for their CBOs to use. For example, a group of four intermediary CBO sites that participated in the virtual visits all used the same cognitive behavioral therapy-based training activity at the beginning of services. The eight-hour training happened over several days. It covered topics including how to perceive situations differently and how environments can dictate thoughts and perceptions. One program staff described it as a way to help participants change how they view themselves and their thoughts about starting or returning to work: "[It changes] *the mindset of how they look at themselves and how they look at their ability to control what happed in their lives. I think is the most important takeaway from that program because it can be applied in so many different aspects, which I think is really important*." Program staff from the individual CBOs were trained at the main intermediary office to provide the training, and they were also guided by a handbook and videos.

While at least twelve sites mentioned having formal training in the case management model they used, staff from at least three sites made the caveat that they cannot formally conduct cognitive behavioral therapy specifically since they are not trained mental health clinicians.

5. Participant perspectives on case management

Site visit interviews asked participants about the services and supports they received from their RP program. Specifically, questions asked what they liked most about the program, which services have been most helpful, and what services or supports they thought would be most useful to them in the future. In response to these questions, participants referenced their case managers or program case management services. Of 14 interviewed participants who offered their insights on case management, 10 felt overwhelmingly positive about the service.

- These 10 participants appreciated feeling valued and being treated well by staff. They mentioned being motivated by case managers who clearly supported and believed in them, which was not always the case with others they encountered outside the program.
- The interviewed participants felt like their case managers were people they could count on (for example, to give them rides, connect them to other supports, or listen to their challenges). The participants emphasized the importance of this kind of rapport.
- Two participants also noted that working with staff who had lived experience with the justice system made them feel understood. It motivated them to see someone who had been in their shoes succeeding.

Participants' appreciation for their case managers

"I wouldn't feel the same if they didn't have the same background, they wouldn't understand—if you actually walk the day to day, you see what I've been through…. It gives me the motivation to see that I can do the same thing you can."

"[Staff] didn't treat [me] like a felon."

"If I call them, if I need something, they'll always help."

— Interviewed RP participants

In addition to the positive relationships and sense of belonging they built with case managers, at least three participants also valued the way case management helped them define their goals and break them into manageable steps. One interviewed participant explained that since she was interested in the culinary field, the program first helped her obtain her food handler's permit and then connected her to a local chef to learn more about the industry. As one interviewed participant said, "*They help you with the little goals first, the reachable stuff first, then step by step until you get there. I think that's what people need, that inspiration."*

The only negative comments interviewed participants made about case management related to the program not being able to fully meet certain basic needs, such as for mental health services, housing, or transportation. At least three participants expressed disappointment about the program not supporting them in these areas.

D. Additional services offered to RP participants

To support participants as they interacted with RP services, grantees offered support and additional services aimed at helping promote participant success and addressing barriers to employment. These services included such offerings as mentoring and legal services, as well as traditional supportive service offerings, such as transportation assistance.

1. Mentoring was an integral part of programming whether it was formal or informal

According to the grantee survey, individual or group mentoring was offered by 79 percent of grantees directly or through partners. Of those surveyed grantees who offered individual or group mentoring, the majority provided mentoring directly (58 percent), while 15 percent offered mentoring services solely through partners and 27 percent offered it both in house and through their partners. Although a majority of both adult and young adult grantees reported offering mentoring, as identified in the grantee survey, more young adult grantees (85 percent) than adult (75 percent) grantees reported offering mentoring services.

In the site visits, at least 14 sites offered informal mentoring services where case managers or partner program staff acted as mentor figures to participants. When asked which program services would impact her future, one participant shared that the mentoring relationship she had built with the case management staff would be the most important to her success and stated that the mentor staff person is a "key member of her small circle of support." On the other hand, 10 sites offered formal mentoring services either in house or through partners with established memoranda of understandings. Sites varied in the number of participants who participated in mentoring, with one site requiring only high-risk participants to take part in mentoring while another site involved all their participants.

> *"It is important to have a set of like-minded people, who are sober, who really care about you and really want you to succeed."*
>
> — Program participant

According to the survey, 37 percent of all grantees indicated staffing a mentoring coordinator for their program. Although young adult grantees more frequently reported offering mentoring, more adult grantees (47 percent) than young adult grantees (20 percent) staffed a mentoring coordinator on their RP programs. During site visits, at least 6 sites indicated that they had a dedicated staff member who provided mentoring services to participants, while at least 10 sites indicated that case managers and/or program managers acted as informal mentors. When formal mentorship was presented at programs, mentoring would occur twice a week, weekly, or monthly. During those sessions, programs would facilitate group discussions on time management, managing difficult situations, overcoming stereotypes, communication skills, and more. Two participants appreciated the network of support they developed working with program staff and the motivation they provided. At least two visited sites emphasized that using mentor facilitators or staff with lived experience was a "key element" of their success in building trust among participants.

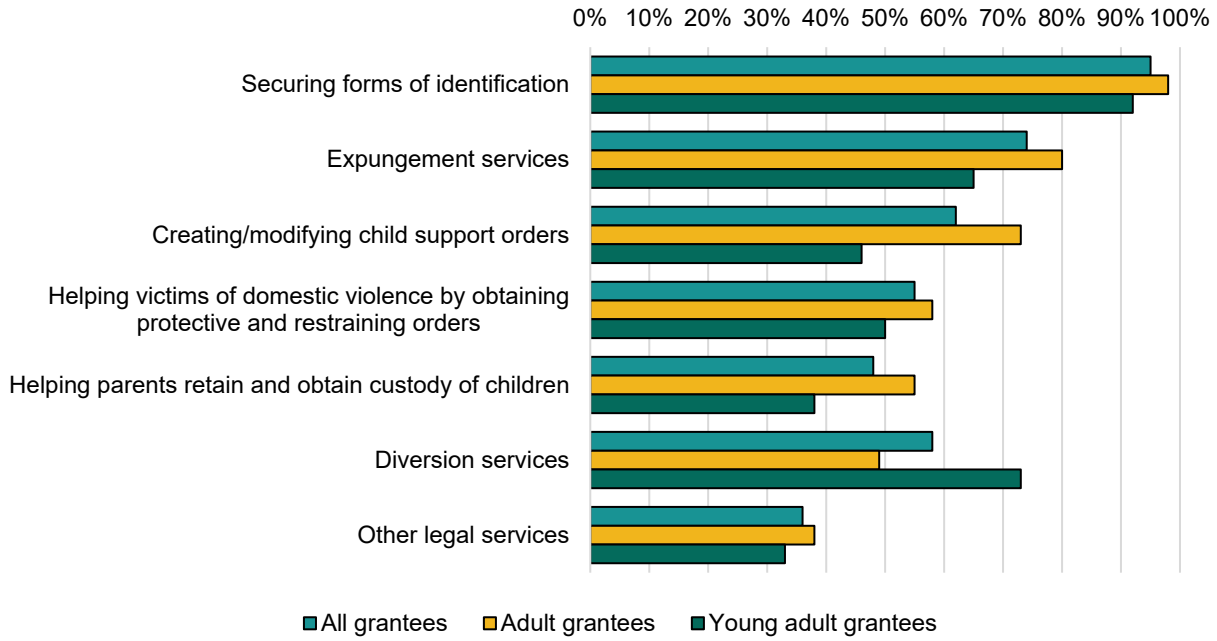
Along with using staff who had lived experience, two sites were anticipating the growth and value of peer mentors—mentors who were formally participants or people with lived experience, while one site had already established a peer-to-peer mentoring system. A participant from that program appreciated the ability to learn from people with similar experiences and was able to "give back to the community" by providing information to others. One site stated that successful participants expressed an interest in providing peer mentoring, but that program needed to ensure that they had created a process and training for that service.

The pandemic created challenges for providing mentoring services. At least two sites paused mentorship programming because they typically occurred in person, and one site stated that they lost contact with a few participants because they were not attending group mentoring sessions in the office. These sites had not yet returned to in-person services at the time of the interviews.

2. Legal services were offered mostly by program partners and covered a range of topics

DOL required that grantees offer legal services and describe these services as part of their proposals, but did not prescribe a certain model or type of services (U.S. DOL 2018, 2019). Grantee survey results provide insights on the availability of and range of legal services for RP participants (Figure V.7). As identified in the grantee survey, partners typically provided these services rather than grantees except for support to secure forms of identification, which grantees more frequently offered than did their partners. Adult and young adult grantees offered many of the same legal services, such as identifications assistance (95 percent) and helping domestic violence victims obtain protective and restraining orders (55 percent). However, adult and young adult grantees also offered some additional legal services, reflecting the needs of their populations of interest. For example, young adult grantees (73 percent) more frequently offered diversion services than did adult grantees (49 percent), as young adult participants may have had limited or no justice involvement, given the eligibility criteria for enrolling in RP young adult programs.[17] Alternatively, adult grantees more frequently reported offering expungement services (80 percent compared to 65 percent). Adult grantees also offered legal services related to parenting, including help with child support and custody issues, potentially reflecting the needs of the older population served through the RP adult grants.

Figure V.7. Percentage of Reentry Project grantees offering different types of legal services, by grant type



Source: Responses from 2018 and 2019 grantee survey (adult grantees, N = 40; young adult grantees, N = 26) question asking, "Which of the following services are offered as part of the RP program?"

During the site visits, all 27 sites stated that they provided legal services, either through referrals or in house. Sites reported that common reasons participants accessed legal services were securing driver's licenses or other forms of identification (seven sites), child support or custody issues (five sites), and

[17] Diversion services redirect individuals from the justice system by utilizing community supports and programming to address behavior and prevent subsequent offenses.

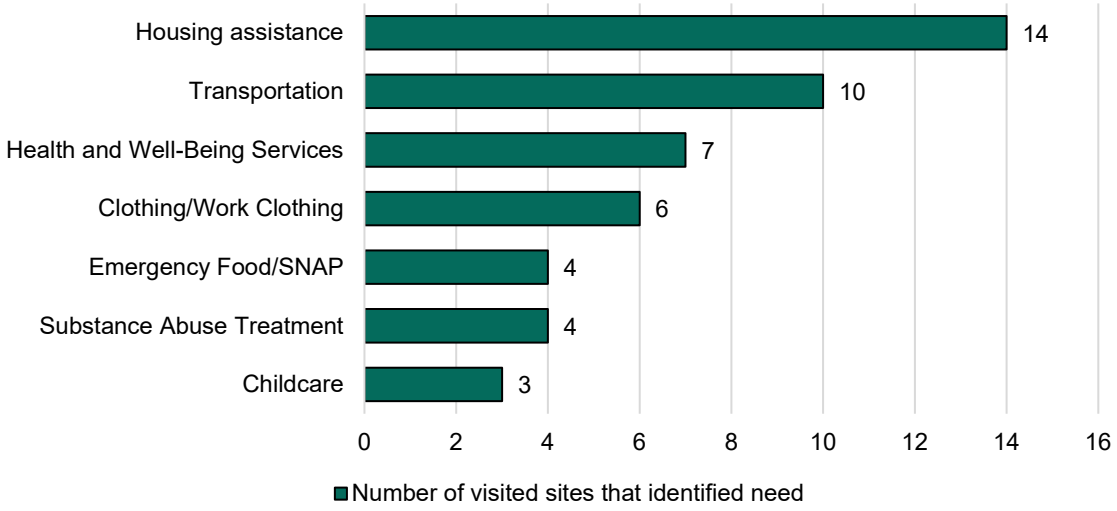
expungement services (four sites). Other legal services identified through visits included corrections of rap sheets, fulfillment of court-mandated courses like anger management, restraining orders or other domestic violence issues, credit improvement, payment of court fees, and immigration. For those who stated their most common request was securing a driver's license or other forms of identification, five sites explained that the request was more specifically related to restoration of participant's driving privileges. At least four sites cited fees and fines owed by participants as a barrier that prevented them from obtaining a driver's license. Two sites shared examples in which a participant accumulated such as a large amount of fees against their license that it took longer than a year to pay back. In addition, driver's licenses are important for some of the career pathways offered by programs, and a program staff from one site reflected that "not having a license leads some employers to view an applicant as unreliable."

3. Supportive services were considered important additions to training services

While supportive services were not a required element of the RP model, when offered in conjunction with training services, two site visit respondents found them critical to sustaining participant engagement. As one case manager stated, "[supportive services] take[s] some of the pressure off the participants." Although site visit respondents discussed the importance of supportive services, according to WIPS data, a relatively small proportion of RP participants received supportive services. Thirty-three percent of all grantee participants received supportive services, with 26 percent of adult grantees and 41 percent of young adult grantees receiving them. However, this may be an undercount of the true percentage of participants who received supportive services as case managers frequently made referrals for this support.

Site visit respondents discussed participants' common supportive service needs and assessed the extent to which these needs could be met through RP services and partners. Program staff cautioned that while they worked with RP participants to identify their supportive service needs, participants often hesitated to share challenges that could be addressed through supportive services. Despite this reticence, housing (14 sites) and transportation assistance (10 sites) stood out as participants' most common supportive service needs, according to program staff (Figure V.8).

Figure V.8. Common participant supportive service needs as reported by visited sites



Source: Virtual site visits (N = 21).

Housing assistance. Participants often needed housing support, but assistance available through RP often fell short of addressing their needs, despite grantees identifying housing assistance as an available offering. As shown through WIPS data, some RP participants experienced homelessness at program entry, with 13 percent of adult participants and 10 percent of young adult participants experiencing homeless when beginning RP services. To address housing needs, 77 percent of grantee survey respondents indicated that their programs provided or referred participants to housing assistance services and 21 site visit grantees described helping participants address housing needs. Site visit respondents from at least 15 grantees listed housing assistance as a major participant need and housing instability as a threat to participant success in programming.

When connecting participants experiencing homelessness or housing instability with assistance, surveyed RP grantees used different approaches for addressing these needs. Among grantee survey respondents, 27 percent offered housing assistance directly through the RP grant funds and 27 percent referred participants to partners for housing assistance. The most common approach employed by 45 percent of grantees included offering some assistance directly through grant funds and referring some participants to partners for assistance.

Despite grantees' efforts to address participants' housing needs, site visit respondents from at least nine sites mentioned that participants' housing need exceeded the amount of support they could provide. Five of those sites cited grant funds as a limiting factor to providing sufficient support for housing assistance. For example, one respondent noted that "*housing supports require a substantial financial component*," which from their perspective could not be fully addressed through RP grant funding. Similarly, respondents from at least one site expressed a desire for more flexibility in RP grant funding so that their program could more fully address participant housing needs. Respondents from at least nine sites cited the limited availability of affordable housing in their communities, which made providing housing assistance difficult, regardless of the funding supports available.

Transportation assistance. RP grantees included in virtual visits commonly provided transportation assistance to help participants successfully engage in RP programming and employment. At least 22 visited sites provided transportation or transportation assistance to participants, with one additional site stating they were in the process of forming a partnership with an organization that could provide such assistance. Ninety-seven percent of survey respondents indicated that they used financial assistance to "cover transportation costs to the program or to court," and virtual site visits revealed that transportation assistance was most commonly in the form of bus passes or gas cards. Four sites provided direct transportation to participants for interviews and/or jobs, which proved challenging to coordinate, according to program staff. At least 16 sites emphasized that transportation was a major challenge for their

> *"Aside from education, they also help with transportation. I did not have a car at the time, and it was hard for me to take public transportation. They bought me tickets ($90/month) and help me get around from September to July (start to end of school). They paid for my monthly ticket to get to school and bought me a bicycle because I had to walk 40 minutes from my house to my bus stop every single day, five days a week. I get off at 10 PM, so they were worried about my safety. When I told them about it, they got me a bus pass to make sure I can get to school safer and got me a bicycle so I can get to school faster."*
>
> — RP participant

participants in maintaining engagement in RP programs or retaining stable employment. Seven sites indicated that public transportation reliability, operating hours, and accessibility exacerbated transportation-related issues for RP participants.

Incentives and stipends. In addition to the variety of supportive services offered by programs, RP programs offered monetary incentives (86 percent of grantee survey respondents) or wages/stipends (77 percent of grantee survey respondents) to motivate RP participants and promote continued engagement in services. Virtual visit respondents from at least 22 sites described how their programs operationalized incentives and stipends. Among the 22 sites offering incentives or stipends, 2 sites only offered these payments to young adult participants. Among the visited sites, grantees provided incentive payments when participants reached program milestones (17 sites) or based upon employment retention (13 sites). Available incentive payments ranged from $25 to $450 and typically came in in the form of gift cards or checks deposited into an individual's "book money" if incarcerated while in training. In addition, at least three sites provided general stipends to participants while they participated in training. Two sites made weekly payments to participants of up to $100, while another site offered $450 payments. The site that provided a weekly payment of $450 spent 70 percent of their requested funds on participant stipends to match earnings that participants would have received through minimum wage employment.

Program milestones that qualified for incentives varied by grantee. Common milestones included earning an industry-recognized training credential, passing a high school equivalency examination, or attending RP programming on a consistent basis (Table V.1). Although it was common for grantees to establish consistent milestones, one site visit grantee provided case managers with discretion to tailor milestones to align with participant needs. This site allocated up to eight $50 gift cards per participant that case managers could use to incentivize engagements, based on individual service delivery plans.

Table V.1. Example program incentive structure as reported by visited sites

Program milestone	Incentive amount
Passing a GED or HiSET (high school) secondary equivalency examination	$100
Obtaining an industry recognized training credential	$50
Obtaining a non-industry recognized training credential	$50
Completing an approved vocational skills training program	$100
Enrolling in a credit-earning college-level course	$100
2nd quarter job retention	$100
4th quarter job retention	$150

Source: Virtual site visits (N = 27).

Note: This example draws on information collected through site visits but is not representative of all sites.

Respondents from eight visited sites generally believed that incentives and stipends could be potentially effective tools for promoting program engagement, while also acknowledging the limitations of these payments. Program staff at eight visited sites believed that incentives kept participants motivated and engaged. Similarly, respondents from the three sites offering stipends recognized the need to compensate participants to promote ongoing participation in services. Staff from one program viewed stipends as "wage replacement," as a useful resource for participants, noting that if they "*could not provide any replacement wages to participants to complete training, it would be hard for participants to prioritize training over the need to support themselves and their families*…." Despite perceived incentive and stipend successes, respondents from three sites mentioned the need for larger incentives to truly generate increased participant engagement. Two sites added that adult participants tended to value incentives more than their young adult participants.

> *"Folks would benefit tremendously from having a stipend. Sometimes I am working with students who are taking our classes during the day and they are working at night. It is a safety issue where they are not able to stay awake. Having a stipend goes a long way in helping folks out."*
>
> — Partner staff

Supporting participants through stipends

One site also conceptualized stipends as a more equitable approach that allows participants to decide for themselves what to spend their stipend on. The stipend was lauded by both program partner staff and by participants. One participant from this program states that because they had a reliable housing situation, they were able to use their stipend for transportation and food. The participant added that because of their age, if it were not for the stipend, they would not have made it through the training on top of working a part-time job.

Additional supports. In addition to helping participant address housing, transportation, and financial needs, RP case managers worked with participants to understand the needs and connect them with necessary supports. Commonly offered supportive services included:

- **Child care.** Forty-four percent of grantee survey respondents indicated that their program could pay for or provide subsidized child care, typically through connections with partner organizations. Site visit respondents reiterate their reliance on partner organization to provide these supports. Nine visited sites noted that some participants requested child-care assistance. In these instances, case managers typically referred participants to partner organizations to receive support identifying and paying for child-care services.
- **Health and well-being.** To support participant's health, 94 percent of surveyed grantees provided health care services or referrals, 94 percent offered help applying for public benefits (Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and others), 86 percent provided substance abuse counseling or treatment, 76 percent arranged for psychological counseling, and 17 percent provided other health and well-being services. Eleven visited sites indicated that they refer participants out for these types of services, and one additional site had five of its own medical facilities that served both their participants and the larger community—which was described as helping its community presence because many organizations and individuals use the facilities. At least six visited sites stated that mental health services were important to supporting a participant's success, and three of those visited sites stated that they would have preferred being able to provide

more of those services in house. As one visited site stated, "*access to those services is a major issue… even if they have insurance, it could be a long wait*."

- **Work clothing and work equipment assistance.** Grantees frequently offered participants help with purchasing work clothing or uniforms, with 94 percent of surveyed grantees offering this service. Respondents from 19 visited sites described providing clothing assistance to participants—through RP grant funds and other sources of leveraged funds—mostly related to work uniforms, work-grade clothing, and work tools. One site added that the young adults they serve were self-conscious about receiving this kind of help due to associated stigma with receiving these kinds of supports. The site described noted that young adults would often wait to ask for this provision when they were alone with a staff member.
- **Food assistance.** At least six visited sites helped provide food support to participants in the form of SNAP referrals, food bags, and/or food vouchers.
- **Other.** Among surveyed grantees, 91 percent provided financial literacy courses, 86 percent provided conflict resolution, and 28 percent provided other support services. One virtual visit site trained their case managers to provide basic financial help and housed a financial center that offered lending circles, car buying, and loan support. Three interviewed participants from virtual site visits indicated that the financial literacy courses they received during RP programming were the most useful support service they received.

E. Challenges encountered and participant perspectives on areas of improvement

Staff from across surveyed grantees and visited sites described common challenges related to case management and supportive services provision. These included:

- **Keeping participants engaged in programming.** Eighty-three percent of surveyed grantees said that engaging and retaining participants was somewhat or very challenging. As with recruiting, engaging participants was described particularly challenging for young adult grantees, with 96 percent of surveyed young adult grantees reporting participant engagement as challenging. Program staff from 15 visited sites also noted that keeping participants engaged or motivated, especially given everything going on in their lives and the world, was difficult.
  - Participants from at least 4 visited sites were required to participate in programming as a condition of their release, and program staff thought that some of the participants with such a condition were less motivated than those who chose to participate on their own.
  - Interviewed participants also described experienced anxiety or other health conditions that made participating challenging, especially during a pandemic.
  - Program and partner staff from at least 6 young adult sites that participated in virtual visits thought that the younger population was especially hard to engage. They noted that young adults did not always have the maturity to see the value in services or were reluctant to participate.

    "Even with incentives, it is more challenging to motivate the young adults in programming."

    — Program staff
  - Program staff from at least 11 visited sites explained that it could be hard to keep in touch with participants due to unreliable phone service, housing instability, rules around communication at halfway houses, and the reliance on virtual services due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Program staff from 20 visited sites felt that their inability to meet all participant needs was a challenge.** Overall, the WIPS data indicate about 26 percent of adult participants and 41 percent of young adult participants received supportive services. Specifically, program staff included in site visits wished there were more referrals (or more they could offer) for mental health, substance use disorder treatment, housing, and transportation. Even when there were good community resources for those needs, staff mentioned long waiting lists for related services.
- **Navigating the COVID-19 pandemic.** According to program staff from at least eight visited sites, the pandemic was also a key challenge for case management specifically because participants experienced additional traumas and case management shifted to being much more virtual with little planning time. As noted above, keeping in touch with participants when they were not frequently having in-person case management sessions could be difficult. As one program staff member said, because of COVID some participants "*have just gone missing*."

VI. Educating and Training Participants

There is a large gap between people in the justice system and the general population in both educational attainment and employment. One-third of incarcerated adults have less than a high school diploma or high school equivalency certification prior to and during incarceration, compared to 14 percent of adults in the general population (Ositelu 2019). Education and training programs can help to address gaps in educational attainment and may promote labor market participation (Ositelu 2019). Through the RP grants, ETA sought to promote positive opportunities to engage in education for individuals with justice involvement (U.S. DOL 2019). RP grants afforded grantees flexibility in designing training services, though they did require the use of at least one of the following approaches: registered, industry-recognized, or pre-apprenticeships, work-based learning, or career pathways (U.S. DOL 2017, 2018, 2019). This chapter reviews the available education and training services to RP participants; the number of participants receiving education and training offerings, including work-based learning (WBL) offerings; who provided the services; and participant perspectives on the available education and training services.

Key findings

- **Grantees offered a diverse set of education and training opportunities to participants.** Per the grantee survey, 98 percent of grantees offered occupational skills training, 80 percent facilitated high school equivalency exam preparation, 44 percent provided college entrance exams assistance, 68 percent offered help acquiring financial aid, and 21 percent extended other educational supports. As described during virtual visits, sites targeted a variety of sectors for training—informed by labor market information, partners, and participant interests—and facilitated access to industry-recognized credentials, such as OSHA certifications, forklift certificates, and certified nursing assistant credentials. (VI.A, VI.B)
- **As reported in the WIPS data, seventy-two percent of RP participants from 2018 to 2019 received education or training services.** Of these services, participants most commonly received postsecondary education leading to a credential or degree (80.7%), occupational skills training (43.3%), and secondary education (37.5%). Fewer participants received registered apprenticeship programming (1.3%) and on-the-job training (2.3%). Of the participants that received training, 80.3 percent completed all trainings they started. (VI.G)
- **While most sites (24 of 27 site visit grantees) reported having a mix of formal and informal education and/or training provider partners, almost half of sites (12) also o, external instructors on site, or both.** Education services provided on site included high school equivalency exam preparation and testing, high school diploma classes, individualized tutoring, financial aid assistance, and college application assistance. Training offered on site primarily included construction, welding, machining, forklift, health care, culinary, and customer service. (VI.A, VI.B)

A. Education offerings

Recognizing the goals of the RP grants, as well as the needs of prospective participants, RP grantees offered both secondary and post-secondary educational services and programs to participants that could potentially address low numbers of educational attainment and employment. WIPS data for 2018 and 2019 participants indicates that 35 percent of all RP participants had not completed high school and less

than 5 percent had furthered their education beyond a high school diploma or equivalent at the start of program entry (see Chapter IV for more information on participant characteristics).

As identified through the grantee survey, RP grantees offered varying education services to meet the diverse needs of RP participants. Common education offerings included:

Secondary education services, including high school equivalency exam preparation and high school diploma programs. Eighty percent of RP grantees responding to the survey offered high school equivalency exam preparation and 59 percent offered high school diploma programs. Through the survey, RP grantees identified that they often engaged partners to provide these services rather than offering them in house. Although adult and young adult grantees frequently offered these services, young adult grantees reported offering them more frequently than adult grantees. For example, 88 percent of surveyed young adult grantees offered high school equivalency exam preparation compared to 75 percent of surveyed adult grantees.

Post-secondary education. As indicated by grantee survey responses, RP grantees also sought to connect participants with post-secondary education opportunities by providing support for the enrollment and financial aid processes. Across all grantee survey respondents, 44 percent provided opportunities for participants to enroll in college entrance exams preparation courses, and 68 percent offered financial aid planning assistance. As with secondary education services, these offerings were reported to be somewhat more common among young adult grantees. Fifty percent of the young adult grantees offered college entrance exam preparation courses compared to 40 percent of adult grantees.

Grantees (21 percent) reported providing participants other education related services such as college application assistance. Through the virtual visits, RP sites provided further insights on how they delivered education offerings to meet the needs of their participants:

- **All 27 sites included in virtual visits offered high school equivalency exam preparation services.** Although all sites offered these services, their approaches for doing so varied. Program staff from 6 sites indicated that their programs paid for participants to attend outside high school equivalency exam preparation courses, or they paid for exam fees. Alternatively, program staff from 12 sites indicated that their programs offered classes on site or provided individualizes tutoring to help with exam preparation. For example, one site described offering an in-person GED class initially, but they pivoted to an individualized tutoring approach during the COVID pandemic. The timing of these services also varied. Program staff reported that the provision of secondary education services could happen prior to enrolling in their RP-funded services, concurrent to occupational training or after other training was completed or a participant obtained employment. For instance, staff at 3 sites explained that their occupational training programs or the industries they targeted required participants to have a high school diploma or high school equivalency certification prior to enrolling in the program. In these cases, the sites would refer potential participants to high school equivalency programs prior to enrolling in occupational skills training. Other sites, who offered secondary educational programs concurrently (at least 5 sites) or did not require high school diplomas or high school equivalency certification to enroll in RP-funded services (at least 3 sites), described the length of secondary educational programs as the reason why they were not a pre-requisite or a requirement for RP services or occupational skills training.

- **Less than half of the virtual visit sites described connecting participants to services to enroll in post-secondary education.** Program staff from at least 11 sites described their program's efforts to coordinate financial aid applications (such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and facilitate access to funds for training programs. Two sites paid for tuition at local community colleges.
- **Access to other education services varied among virtual visit sites.** Respondents from 7 sites indicated that they offered or could refer to English as a second languages services, although most of the other 20 sites noted that they received few requests for these services. Program staff from 12 sites described offering tutoring services. For example, one site tutored participants who needed additional help while enrolled in a construction math class.

Through the grantee survey and virtual visits, RP grantees identified challenges providing or connecting participants to education-related services. Over half of surveyed grantees (54 percent) reported some challenges providing or giving access to high-quality education-related activities. Through virtual visits, sites provided further insights on the challenges their programs encountered related to connecting participants to education-related services. Respondents from 14 sites noted that the length of educational programs often disincentivized participants from completing the educational programs. According to the site visit respondents, participants' financial constraints exacerbated this problem, as participants needed to earn money while enrolled in classes. While the lack of financial support and the length of programs made it more challenging for participants to complete educational services according to site visit respondents, sites did report a few successes. Respondents from 11 sites mentioned using stipends to overcome the financial challenges of taking time off to go through an education program.

B. Training services

RP programs prioritized helping participants find and enter employment by connecting them to occupational skills training. ETA set goals related to occupational skills training and apprenticeship program participation, and placement in employment, apprenticeship, and post-secondary education (U.S. DOL 2019). To realize these goals, RP grantees provided participants with occupational skills training in a variety of sectors and occupations that could lead to employment or placement in an apprenticeship or post-secondary education program.

RP grantees reported that they identified target sectors for training available through their programs. During virtual visits, respondents discussed how they determined their target sector or sectors. Sites offered or could refer participants to training in a variety of sectors with most providing training for multiple sectors and industries. Twenty-one sites targeted at least two sectors for training. Sites referred or offered training in such sectors as automotive; barber and cosmetology; construction; custodial and building maintenance; customer service; food and hospitality; health care; information technology; manufacturing; and transportation, logistics, and warehousing. The most common sectors targeted for training by sites were in construction (24); followed by food and hospitality (19); and transportation, logistics and warehousing (18). Table VI.1 includes information from sites about targeted sectors.

Table VI.1. Sectors/industries targeted for training by sites, as reported by the visited sites

Sector/industry	Number of sites
Construction	24
Food and hospitality	19
Transportation, logistics, and warehousing	18
Health care	8
Manufacturing	7
Customer service	6
Automotive	5
Information technology	4
Barber and cosmetology	2
Custodial and building maintenance	1

Source: Virtual site visits (N = 27).

Note: Grantees could focus on multiple industries.

Site visit grantees reported that they chose sectors and related trainings based on a variety of factors. When selecting their focal sectors, RP grantees considered:

- **Local labor market information.** At least 7 sites described using labor market information (LMI) to narrow down training options in in-demand fields and to identify the skills needed in those fields. One site used LMI to help target occupations in the health care field, an in-demand industry in their local area. Another site described how they relied heavily on LMI data, not only to identify the six industries they offered training in, but to also provide participants detailed information on the expected career pathways in those sectors. At least 4 of the 10 intermediary subgrantee sites noted that their training offerings were determined locally and were connected to in-demand opportunities in the area.
- **Employer input on target occupations and trainings.** Two sites used existing employer partnerships to determine in-demand occupations and training. One site described engaging employers and other partners to identify trending jobs that helped inform program staff on what kinds of trainings might be most beneficial to participants. This site employed a community engagement committee, which met with employers and partners to discuss a variety of issues, including, local in-demand jobs. A second site highlighted their "employer-driven" approach to training programs in five industries; the site worked with employer partners to establish training requirements for their vocational training programs in advanced manufacturing, health care, information technology, transportation and logistics, hospitality, and construction.
- **Availability of local training options.** Two sites noted the availability of training instructors or providers in the local area as being a factor in the types of training programs they offered. One site noted that they used their area's eligible training provider list, as training was typically paid for by their local workforce agency. Another site reported that while it wished it could offer forklift training—a training they noted as versatile in terms of industry—they were limited by the trainers they had on staff, which did not include staff who could train participants in forklift operation.
- **Participant interests.** At least 11 sites considered participant interest and motivation in the types of training they offered. Typically, these were sites that referred participants to external trainings and could link participants to training in a variety of industries and occupations. At least 8 of these sites

described using a combination of formal career assessment and exploration tools, in addition to case management, to review possible training options with participants. One site noted that rather than offering a menu of trainings in particular industries, their approach was to use a participant career profiler and interests to develop a plan for training.

Based on the 2018 and 2019 grantee surveys, 98 percent of grantees offered occupational skills training. Training could lead to industry-recognized credentials. According to site visit data, the most common were OSHA 10 or 30 (20 sites or their partners offered this certification), forklift certification (19 sites), welding (15 sites), and ServSafe certificate (11 sites).[18] Participants could also earn certifications in health care. Six sites offered a certified nursing assistant (CNA) certification, six sites offered a phlebotomy certificate, and 4 sites offered a medical assistant certification. Participants interested in the transportation, logistics, and warehouse sector could receive a commercial driver's license (CDL) through at least 14 sites. Importantly, many of these credentials, like the OSHA certificates, forklift, CDL and welding certificates, could be used across multiple sectors and industries, according to site visit respondents.

One grantee offered a four-week commercial driver's license training. Participants in this training underwent two weeks of classroom-based training followed by two weeks of hands-on training driving.

Typically, CDL, CNA, phlebotomy, and medical assistant certificates were earned through a combination of classroom-based training and applied hands-on learning. ServSafe and forklift training were shorter (usually one- to two-day trainings), although they typically included both classroom and hands-on training. One site, which conducted on-site forklift training, included a one-hour safety training and 20 minutes of maneuverability training in their program. OSHA 10 and OSHA 30 trainings were earned after 10- and 30-hour trainings were completed, respectively. These were typically classroom-based trainings.

"I worked for something and I got something…. I never thought I would get these certificates [forklift and flagging]."

— RP participant

Respondents from at least seven sites described struggling with the types of training programs they could offer. For example, one site noted that participants were not interested in pursuing a career path in construction, but the site had limited staffing capacity and funding to teach an additional training program. Another site noted that welding, a popular training program at the site, was hard to staff as potential instructors could make more as welders than as instructors for this course. As a result, they stopped offering the program when they could no longer find instructors for all components. Five other sites noted that they had some staff turnover during the grant period, including with their trainers and instructors. Two sites were able to hire a new trainer or instructor, while two others turned to existing staff who could also provide training. One site reported that their instructor position remained unfilled after being fully staffed for a short period

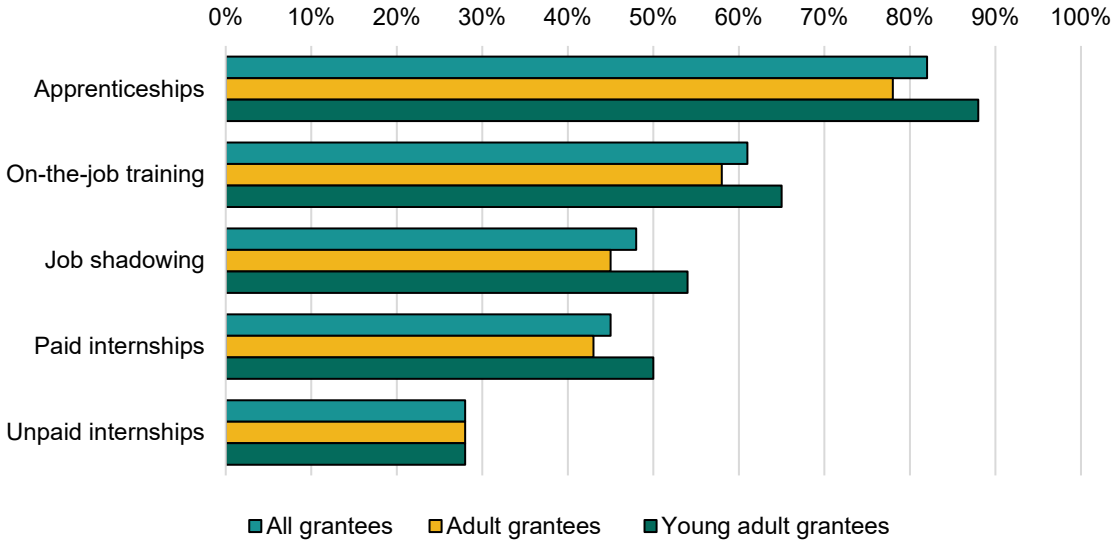
[18] Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) certification is a training to prepare individuals working in construction and general industry on workplace safety and risk. For more, see https://www.osha.gov/training. OSHA-10 is not a recognized WIOA credential. Guidance on WIOA industry recognized certificates and certifications is available here: https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL/TEGL_10-16-Change1_Acc.pdf#page=12. ServSafe is an affiliate of the National Restaurant Association that delivers training to food service professionals and offers certifications necessary to comply with state and local food handling policies. More information on each certification offered through ServSafe is available here: https://www.servsafe.com/ServSafe-Manager/Get-Certified.

of time. To avoid these types of challenges, two sites focused on providing training in sectors that described as easier to teach or quicker to complete, such as food and hospitality programs.

C. Work-based learning offerings

Grantees offered WBL opportunities to their participants, such as apprenticeships, on-the-job training, group or individual job shadowing, and internships. As identified through the grantee survey, RP grantees most frequently offered WBL through apprenticeships (82 percent) and on-the-job training (59 percent) (Figure VI.2).[19] Except for unpaid internships, young adult grantees responding to the survey offered WBL opportunities more frequently than adult grantees. As discussed earlier in this report, adult participants tended to focus on entering employment quickly rather than enrolling occupational skill training offerings, including WBL, which may explain differences in offering across grant types.

Figure VI.2. Percentage of Reentry Project grantees offering each type of work-based learning, by grant type



Source: Responses from 2018 and 2019 grantee survey (adult grantees, N = 40; young adult grantees, N = 26) question asking, "Which of the following services are offered as part of the RP program?"

Among the grantees included in virtual site visits, at least 23 offered WBL opportunities for RP participants. As reported through site visit data, sites developed these opportunities by identifying employers who could provide quality WBL experiences. Sites also researched in-demand careers to provide WBL opportunities that could lead to marketable work experience. Across these grantees, the types of WBL opportunities as well as their length varied from light-touch job shadowing offerings to more intensive apprenticeship offerings. Available WBL offerings included:

- **Job shadowing.** Eight sites described job shadowing opportunities as short in length, ranging from several days to two weeks. In addition to longer job shadowing opportunities, at least two sites offered job tours to participants (typically two hours in length). Program staff described these opportunities as getting participants "*out in the real world to meet staff and see how things actually*

[19] While over 50 percent of grantees reported offering apprenticeship and on-the-job training opportunities, WIPS data shows 1.3% of participants received registered apprenticeships and 2.3% received on the job training.

work" in their chosen career. Program staff from these sites also noted that occasionally, job shadowing and job tours could lead to employment. For instance, one site described using job tours to introduce participants to employers they hoped to work for; employer partners would do same-day interviews with participants at this site.

- **Internships.** Twelve sites facilitated paid and/or unpaid internships. At least nine of these sites offered paid internships. One site noted that internships typically paid the minimum wage. Like job shadowing opportunities, internships at two sites were also used as an on ramp to a potential job, in which both the participant and employer could assess if there was the potential for employment. One site noted that internships helped employers, who had reservations about hiring people with justice involvement, be more open to the idea of hiring someone with a justice background. Another site, noted that their participants, who were training in the field of food and hospitality, typically were placed with employers after their internship placement. Internships, as described by five sites, could vary from one to eight weeks in length.
- **On-the-job training.** Grantees also worked with employers or their partners to facilitate OJT for the participants. Program staff from at least ten sites noted they offered OJT; the experience typically ranged from two to eight weeks. Wages for OJT also varied. One site reported wages ranging from $9 to $13 per hour, while another reported wages between $10 and $14 per hour, depending on the industry. Like internships, one site described OJT as a way to reassure employers that a candidate could be a good fit.
- **Pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship.** Nine sites offered or connected participants to pre-apprenticeship programs (typically in preparation for occupations in the building trades). Respondents from one site noted that participants in apprenticeship programs in the trades typically earned a starting wage of about $18 per hour. In the case of pre-apprenticeships, using industry-recognized curriculum, such as the multicraft core curriculum developed by the building trades (used at two sites), provided both classroom and experiential learning. Respondents from one site with connections to a local pre-apprenticeship program for young adults noted that participants received a $1,700 stipend upon program completion.

When reflecting on their decisions to offer WBL opportunities, respondents from 12 of the virtual visit sites described WBL as a promising strategy for motivating participants to enroll in training by offering a way to earn and learn. To that end, respondents from 15 of the 23 sites offering WBL highlighted successes among participants enrolled in WBL opportunities. One site described success placing participants who completed a pre-apprenticeship in related apprenticeships. Respondents from another described using OJT as a strategy for placing individuals who completed training in employment. For example, one participant trained as a CDL driver struggled to find full-time employment. The site placed the participant in an OJT position, leading to subsequent full-time employment.

> *"People learn in different ways and physically being there, building a routine and participating in these things is a tremendous help. Even if you don't stay it's like a riding on a bike…. You can't teach on the job experience and giving them that resource sets them up for future success."*
>
> — Grantee staff discussing WBL in the hospitality industry

Five sites noted that their programs did not offer WBL. Respondents from three of these sites provided insights on why WBL did not fit into their program models. For example, program staff from one site

described their model as prioritizing providing participants with all services on site rather than connecting participants to off-site training opportunities, such as WBL offerings. Respondents from another site noted that their program did not focus on WBL opportunities because participants could access those services through existing community programs.

Sites includes in virtual visits also reflected on barriers to developing WBL opportunities, as well as challenges participants faced engaging in these offerings. Four sites described challenges with WBL opportunities, especially paid opportunities, which were described as more attractive to participants. These sites described issues with transportation; participants could not get to employer sites if the WBL opportunity was unpaid. Two sites described the difficulty in keeping connected with employer partners, especially during the pandemic, to offer WBL opportunities. At another site, program management staff stated that they would like to have more fully developed paid OJT opportunities for their RP participants because the earn-and-learn model is an advantageous approach for both the program and the employer. Yet, they were not able to find a funding stream for this approach, until toward the end of their RP grant. A staff member from another program expressed that creating meaningful paid WBL opportunities was challenging, and if they could find a way to fund these, it would be "a value-add." Interviewed participants also described experiencing challenges participating in WBL opportunities, such as inability to find reliable transportation to the site and urgent financial constraints that compelled them to look for paid employment instead of participating in any WBL position (especially if unpaid).

D. Education, training, and work-based learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

As described by site visit respondents, the COVID pandemic affected sites' abilities to offer education, training, and WBL opportunities to their participants.

- **The pandemic shifted some occupational skill training programs online**, which posed challenges for participants who did not have the proper equipment to access the training (ten sites). To address this, as reported in site visits, at least 4 sites offered participants laptops and 10 sites offered computer literacy training. There was the additional challenge of COVID-19 fatigue, where participants were exhausted of virtual engagements.

> *"We haven't had any opportunities for WBL during COVID, but that was more on the employer side and their protocols and control over people coming into their facilities."*
>
> — Program staff

- **Six sites struggled with participant digital literacy and access to technology**, which made it challenging to provide remote services because participants needed additional learning and skill development with computers and remote learning. Staff members at five of these sites also described reticence from participants to engage in online learning due to a preference to in-person learning.
- **Some sites also experienced decreases in the types of educational services available**. Four sites noted that educational services were on hiatus or had reduced the number of participants they could serve to accommodate for social distancing. In one case, a site's education partner reduced the frequency of testing for the HS equivalency exam and cut the number of available testing spots from 18 to 4 seats.

- **Some sites halted occupational skills training that could be done in person only**, such as forklift training (two sites). Some sites delayed the hands-on portions on their trainings (six sites), such as experiential components of a pre-apprenticeship construction program (one site), until in-person services could be resumed. When sites could return to in-person services, they limited classroom sizes and hand-on training sessions to accommodate for social distancing.

E. Availability of career pathways

ETA asked RP applicants to identify and describe the employment-focused services they would offer, such as skills training leading to industry-recognized credentials, apprenticeship, WBL, or career pathways (U.S. DOL 2018, 2019). As described by site visit respondents, all sites embedded career pathways in their programs. However, when asked about career pathways, respondents reflected on them in two ways: as pathways with defined training offerings or as a tool for career exploration with participants. As described by site visit respondents, 12 sites established career pathways for specific industries and occupations by identifying trainings that would help participants progress along established pathways. Six of the 12 sites followed career pathways developed through their intermediary organization.

When developing career pathways, sites considered:

- **Availability of training opportunities, especially quick turnaround trainings.** When selecting pathways, the grantees hoped to identify pathways with existing training opportunities valued by employers in the target industries. Given participant desire to move quickly to employment, grantees also worked to identify quick turnaround trainings that provided industry-recognized credentials. For example, one grantee offered construction and culinary pathways. Both pathways included quick turnaround trainings, such as OSHA and ServSafe food manager certifications, which are necessary for employment in the target industries, quick to complete, and valued by employers. As respondents from another grantee noted, the career pathways allowed them to address the short-term goal of employment while also identifying long-term career goals.
- **Long-term programming sustainability.** At least three sites viewed the RP grants as an opportunity to develop career pathways to support sustainable programming. One grantee highlighted that they knew that "career pathways provide more readiness and training on the frontend that would lead to more stability and sustainability for the graduating participant" than traditional job placement services. By establishing pathways, they hoped to set participants up for retained employment rather than just job placement.
- **Previously defined career pathways.** Four sites described developing career pathway for prior grants, including prior DOL-funded reentry grants. When relying on existing career pathways, the four RP grantees tailored the available training offerings to align with the needs of RP participants. They also worked to identify employer placement partners that would be open to hiring individuals with justice involvement.

Among the grantees that used defined career pathways, respondents highlighted a few key successes and challenges related to their use. Sites that developed construction pathways pointed to connections with unions as helping facilitate high-wage employment for participants. Other sites noted that articulated pathways made "programming more real for participants, they incentives steps through the pathways and celebrate success throughout." Although grantees viewed career pathways as a promising approach for serving RP participants, respondents offered their insights on related challenges. At least two grantees

stated that participants were not always interested in training in the available career pathways, limiting their engagement with RP. Respondents from at least two other grantees noted that participants' desire to enter employment often led them to immediately seek job placement rather than training along the established career pathways.

F. Career exploration

At least four sites described using a career pathways approach to guiding participants' career exploration but did not define specific career pathways for the purposes of the RP grant. In these instances, program staff would explore industries and careers with participants. Depending on participant interests, staff helped them identify and connect participants to training aligned with their chosen career paths. For example, one site with a construction career pathway provided participants with an initial 2-week construction training and, if desired by the participant, could then connect them to a 12-week welding training that would further their skills in the field. Moreover, at least six sites described their efforts to provide stackable credentials to participants. Two sites noted that participants could build on an initial ServSafe food handler certification by completing a ServSafe food manager training.

While further training and education was available to participants who desired additional services, at least five sites did not describe a demand for future services in their participants' chosen career pathways. They cited participant desire to complete services that would lead to immediate employment as a key reason for a low take-up of further education or training. One site noted that the current economic context and tight labor market made additional training less attractive to participants, as they could find immediate or lucrative employment without further education or training.

"It's hard for us to tell them that they should spend all this time on those trainings [when they] could get higher paying jobs and progress in those fields without getting those trainings."

"As jobs become more plentiful, participants become less interested in doing those step by step pathways. It's always been that way, but when jobs were less available it was easier for them to see the benefit then."

— Grantee staff

Another site described the priority of meeting participant basic needs and well-being before participants seriously considered a career pathway. Grantee staff at one site remarked, "*It's difficult in a short time to get young adults on a career path, especially when there's trauma and so much going on. Part of the healing is in the stabilization. After that, they can start thinking about longer-term career paths. It's not necessarily a linear path for young adults. That's what's nice about having [our program] embedded in the workforce systems because people can always come back for things like training when they're ready*."

G. Number of participants in education and training offerings

Grantees offered a diverse set of educational and training services to their participants and as reported in the WIPS data, a large portion of RP participants did receive education or training services (72 percent). However, grantees did not all provide training to the same amount of their participants. According to WIPS data, nine percent of grantees provided training to all their program participants while a fourth of grantees provided training to less than half of their participants. Table VI.2 shows the variation of participant training rates among grantees.

In practice, education and training services were concentrated in a few categories. The most common services participants received included postsecondary education leading to a credential or degree from an accredited institution (80.7 percent), occupational skills training (43.3 percent), and secondary education (37.5 percent). Table VI.3 provides more information on the various types of education and training services RP participants received, training completion rates, and includes a breakdown of these services and training completion by adult and young adult participants.

Table VI.2. Percentage of Reentry Project participants receiving training, by grantee

RP participants receiving training	Share of 2018 and 2019 RP grantees
100 percent	9%
90–99 percent	16%
75–89 percent	17%
50–74 percent	33%
49 percent and below	25%

Source: Workforce Integrated Performance System data, July 1, 2018–December 31, 2021 (N = 81).

Note: One grantee with missing WIPS data.

In most cases, adult participants accessed services at higher rates than young adult participants. However, young adult participants who often lacked a secondary credential upon enrollment also accessed secondary education at a much higher rate than adult participants (42.1 percent compared to 29.0 percent). One site, who targeted young adults in particular, offered an explanation for this dynamic; their program made an effort to help participants obtain a high school diploma as they considered it an essential piece in helping young adult gain employment.

Table VI.3. Education and training services received by Reentry Project participants, by target population

Service type	All participants (N = 17,361)	Adult participants (N = 9,098)	Young adult participants (N = 8,263)
Education services			
Postsecondary education	80.7%	86.5%	73.2%
Secondary education	37.5%	29.0%	42.1%
Training services			
Occupational skills training	43.3%	60.9%	24.0%
Registered apprenticeship program	1.3%	1.8%	0.8%
Skill upgrading	2.1%	2.8%	1.4%
On-the-job training	2.3%	3.0%	1.4%
Incumbent worker training	1.1%	1.4%	0.7%
Customized training	1.0%	1.5%	0.4%
Training completed			
Any training	84.3%	89.7%	76.8%
All trainings started	80.3%	85.5%	73.1%

Source: Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS) data, July 1, 2018–December 31, 2021 (N = 17,361).

Note: The section of the table on training completed is based on the number of participants who entered training, not all participants (N = 12,118).

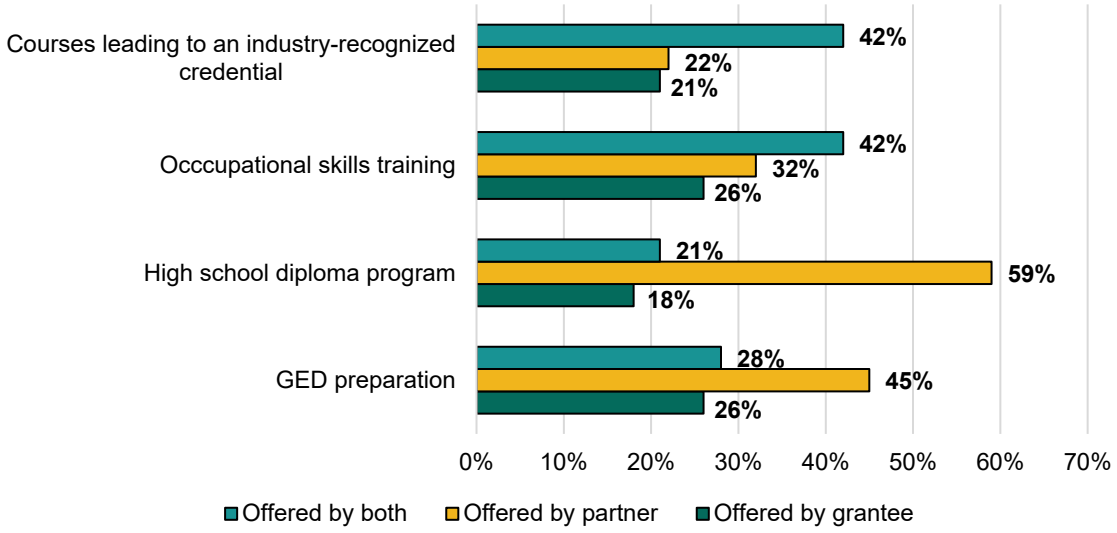
H. Staffing and partnership structures for education and training services

To meet the education and training needs of RP participants, the RP grantees provided direct services to participants while also engaging with partners to connect participants with services available in their local communities.

1. Grantee-provided education and training services

At least half of all grantees provided some in-house education or training services. Among the grantee survey respondents, 55 percent of grantees had at least one vocational training instructor on staff, while 35 percent had at least one secondary education instructor on staff. Although the surveyed RP grantees reported employing staff in these positions to support RP participants, they typically did so in a part-time capacity. More than 75 percent of grantee staff in these roles worked part-time on their grantee's RP programs (Table III.3). This dynamic is also reflected in the percentage of grantees that indicated they offered high school equivalency exam preparation, high school diploma programs, or occupational skills training in house. Grantees typically reported relying on partners to offer these services or offered them in conjunction with partners (Figure VI.3).

Figure VI.3. Percentage of Reentry Project grantees reporting they provided education or training services directly, through partners, or both



Source: Responses from 2018 and 2019 grantee survey (N = 66) question asking, "For each of the services you offer as part of your RP program, are these services offered by your organization, a partner, or both?"

Through virtual visits, sites provided further insights on their approaches for delivering these services, including the extent to which they relied on program staff to deliver them. Twelve of the sites included in the visits reported that they had at least one instructor on staff that provided education or training services during their RP grant period. One site, whose vocational instructor had been at the site for more than 10 years, expressed the importance of continuity and consistency with instructor positions.

Education services. Among the 12 sites that described providing education services in house, available services and activities included high school equivalency exam preparation and testing, classes for high school diploma, individualized tutoring, and financial aid and college application assistance. Four of those sites also offered support for English language learners, but staff from two sites noted that there had not been any participants who used those services. Only two sites reported having external instructors on site that provided education services. Both sites offered high school equivalency classes—one taught by a community college instructor and the other by an instructor from a partner organization. Instructors from these sites taught separate classes for young adult (ages 18 to 24) and adult (over age 25) RP participants.

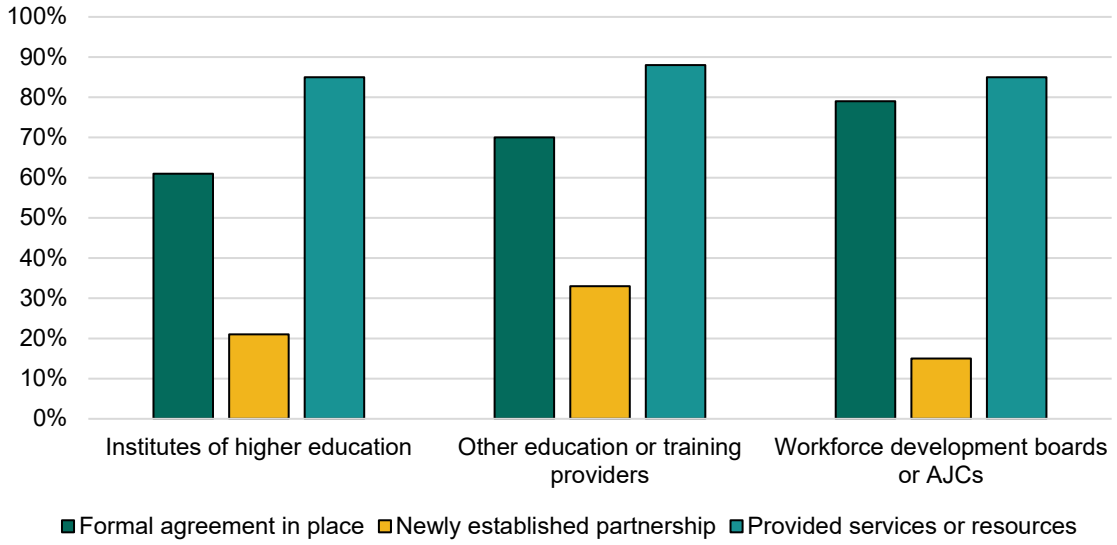
> *"If you have turnover at the vocational instructor position, if you do not already have someone qualified that can take the position you will have a huge gap in the organization. Training will slow down tremendously. And that slowdown will lead to drop-outs; the participants will 'ghost' you. They can and will get up and leave."*
>
> — Grantee staff

Occupational skills-training offerings. Eleven sites offered occupational and vocational trainings in house through program staff, external instructors on site, or both. Having external instructors on site appeared to be slightly more common for training services than education services, with three sites providing various trainings in construction, welding, forklift, machining, culinary, and health care (certified nursing assistant and dental assistant). An external instructor at one of the sites made training more accessible to RP participants by shifting class times to accommodate their work schedules. For sites whose program staff provided training, culinary training was the most common, followed by OSHA certifications, construction, and customer service.

2. Using partners to deliver education and training services

Engaging partners was described as a key strategy among RP grantees for providing education and training services to participants. As shown in Figure VI.3, RP grantees frequently relied on partners to offer these services to RP participants. Since grantees leveraged partners to provide education and training services, as indicated by grantee survey responses, RP grantees sought to formalize their partnerships (Figure IV.4). Often, RP site visit grantees engaged existing partners through the RP grants; however, grantees also forged new partnerships through the RP grants to promote participant access to available education and training services. RP grantees most frequently partnered with workforce partners (85 percent) and the majority of RP grantees had partnerships in place with educational institutions that provided services to RP participants (85 Percent) (Figure IV.4).

Figure VI.4. Percentage of grantees with formalized or new partnerships for the Reentry Project grants



Source: Response from 2018 and 2019 grantee survey (N = 66) questions asking, "Does your organization have formal agreements, also known as partnerships, with any of the following partner types" and "Which of these partnerships are newly established as a result of the RP grant?" and "Please indicate which partner/partners provided the following types of program development and support activities for your RP program?"

Note: A formal agreement is a memorandum of understanding or subcontract a grantee may have in place with a partner. A newly established partnership is a partner a grantee did not have prior to receiving a RP grant and formed a partnership with as a result of the grant. Grantees also indicated in the survey which types of partners provided their program with in-kind resources or services, such as an educational institution providing high school equivalency exam preparation.

Through virtual visits, sites discussed the partners that they engaged to serve RP participants, as well as the ways in which they collaborated to advance their programs' goals. Virtual visits highlighted the following:

- **Most sites (24) included in the site visits reported a mix of formal and informal education and/or training provider partners.** Education services through partners primarily included high school equivalency exam preparation and testing and education supports such as tutoring. Training partners offered a wide range of trainings under various industries including the building trades, transportation and logistics, health care, and culinary. One site mentioned that although they had a good mix of partners, it would have been beneficial to have multiple partners who provided the same types of training so participants would have more options that work with their schedule.
- **At least nine sites had partnerships with community colleges, which offered both education and training services.** Four sites expressed that there was a value add in their partnerships with community colleges because they could provide additional services and supports (for example, facilitating workshops with RP participants who were interested in returning to school, job preparation and placement services, and other supports including mental health resources and access to food pantries). One of the sites noted that the education services the college provided were above and beyond what program staff could provide participants.

- **Nine sites leveraged their partnerships with AJCs, higher education institutions, and nonprofit organizations to cover participant training costs.** This was more common among sites with AJC partners due to the availability of federal WIOA Title I funds. An AJC partner for one of the sites expressed that they would like to see more co-enrollment so that funds could be used for more advanced, longer-term training programs resulting in more skill development, advanced degrees, and better-paying jobs. Of the nine sites, two had higher education partners who leveraged university funds to provide free construction training or offered discounted training opportunities. Only one site reported that their nonprofit training provider partner covered training costs.
- **At least two sites provided education and training services inside justice system facilities so participants could earn their high school equivalency or training certifications prior to release.** One site expressed that their goal is for participants to complete training and have a job secured by the time program staff pick them up upon release. The other site noted the value in providing services in the facilities and being able to engage with participants. Both sites mentioned that participants can continue to receive RP services at the program sites post-release.

Although sites often relied on partners to deliver education and training services, respondents from two site visit grantees highlighted that partners' limited experience serving individuals with justice involvement posed challenges. These respondents indicated that education and training partners may not always be aware of the additional barriers participants face due to their limited experience working with justice-involved individuals. One site highlighted that offsite training partners were not as flexible around attendance. They explained that a benefit to on-site education and training services is that program staff can promptly address barriers and challenges as they come up. The second site noted that their community college partner may not know about the barriers preventing participants from attending classes, such as lack of transportation or other competing responsibilities. The site tried to address these challenges by communicating with the college and working together to remove barriers, such as providing transportation assistance.

I. Participant perspectives on education and training services

Participants' insights and perspectives are an important mechanism for understanding the types of services offered by grantees. Program participants from 10 of 23 sites in which participant interviews were held described positive experiences with training and expressed that the services and certifications they received prepared them to secure employment or develop their career. Three interviewed participants noted that the trainings helped them with career advancement either through a promotion or getting a better job after their initial placement. For example, a participant was immediately promoted to forklift operator as soon as she received her forklift certification. Another interviewed participant described a sense of motivation as a result of going through training:

"[The grantee] paid for my school… to be a plumber, and that motivated me to become a better man. I'm going to get all that they paid for. If they paid for my school, I'll be the best plumber there is. I can fix anything in my house right now because I went to school for it."

Two interviewed participants had different experiences with training and noted challenges with wages upon training completion. One participant received their ServSafe certification but was working in the warehousing industry. They expressed a preference for working in the culinary field, but it was not

enough to make ends meet. Another participant added that although training would help find employment, it would not be for a job with higher wages:

"They'll help me get a job, but it won't be a job that pays me $20–25 an hour like I want."

An additional challenge an interviewed participant highlighted was feeling that they had limited training options due to age. An older RP participant was not initially interested in general labor until they learned that that it took less time to become a journeyman in general labor (two years) compared to other building trades (five to seven years). Given their age, the participant decided to pursue general labor in order to advance quicker and begin earning money:

"If I was 20, I would have gone through one of the other five-year apprenticeship programs."

Another RP participant expressed that they would have liked to see more variation in placement opportunities, such as positions with private construction companies, jobs in industries beyond the building trades, and opportunities for individuals who obtained degrees while incarcerated.

Interviewed participants from four sites provided various suggestions for improving education or training services: implementing more structured high school equivalency exam classes; providing individualized high school equivalency exam support; adding courses on such topics as financial literacy; offering additional trainings in industries outside the trades, such as barber training and cosmetology; more hands-on training in settings that replicate the job site; and access to more information on career advancement resources.

VII. Connecting Participants with Employers

In addition to supporting participants through education and training offerings, RP grantees worked to connect participants with employers through ongoing employment engagement activities, recognizing the importance that DOL places on serving employers in addition to job seekers through grants such as the RP grants (U.S. DOL 2018, 2019). RP programs partnered with employers in multiple ways to help RP participants enter employment—from designing work-readiness training to developing jobs and placement services to meet both participants and employer needs. This chapter provides an overview of employment services, including RP staff structure, pre-employment training, employer engagement, job development and placement, and successes and challenges.

Key findings

- Nearly all grantees (98 percent) that responded to the survey, and over three-quarters of the visited RP sites, reported that they provided RP participants with work readiness services and a variety of other pre-employment services (either in house, through partners, or both) that were designed to help participants with the soft skills needed in employment contexts. (VII.B)
- RP program staff identified four strategies they perceived as successful for employer outreach and recruitment: (1) conducting outreach through in-person meetings with employers and by serving on employer boards and coalitions (reported by program staff at nine sites), (2) educating employers and encouraging them to hire justice-involved individuals (reported by RP program staff from five sites), (3) thinking of employers as their customers (reported by RP program staff from three sites), and (4) identifying employers who have a history of hiring justice-involved individuals (reported by program staff from four sites). (VII.C.1)
- RP program staff identified the following strategies that they perceived as successful for building on-going relationships with employers: (1) holding regular meetings of employer advisory groups to provide feedback to the program and to cultivate a deeper understanding of "second chance" employment (reported by program staff from six sites); (2) leveraging and building on existing employer networks that they had developed through related work before receiving their RP grants (reported by four sites); (3) demonstrating to employers that they provided on-going support to them and their participants, even after placement in their job (reported by RP program staff from four sites); and (4) collaborating with employers on training content and participant's readiness for job placement. (VII.C.2)
- The most common challenges in employment services reported in the grantee survey were around placing participants into employment (70 percent) and engaging employers (55 percent). (VII.F)
- Interviewed participants from seven visited sites expressed that the support and guidance they receive in the program allowed them to gain employment and helped them recover from difficult experiences. Twelve employer partners from 26 visited sites shared success stories about coordinating closely with RP program staff to support new employees.[20] Ten interviewed employer partners shared their satisfaction with the employees they hired through their partnership with the RP site, noting that these employees are motivated, well-prepared, reliable, and from the community in which the business is located. (VII.F)

[20] Employer interviews were conducted at 26 of the 27 sites. Interviews were conducted with a total of 41 employer partners.

A. Delivering employment services to participants and employers

To facilitate connections between RP participants and employers, RP grantees developed staffing models to build these connections. As reported through the grantee survey, 88 percent of RP grantees employed at least one staff person as a job coach, job developer, or employment specialist. On average, surveyed RP grantees employed 1.5 individuals in these roles, and as identified in the survey, about half of these staff (54 percent) worked on the RP grants part-time. Based on their survey responses, adult and young adult grantees followed similar staffing approaches; they employed similar numbers of staff in these roles, on average, and about half of the staff for both grant types worked on RP part-time.

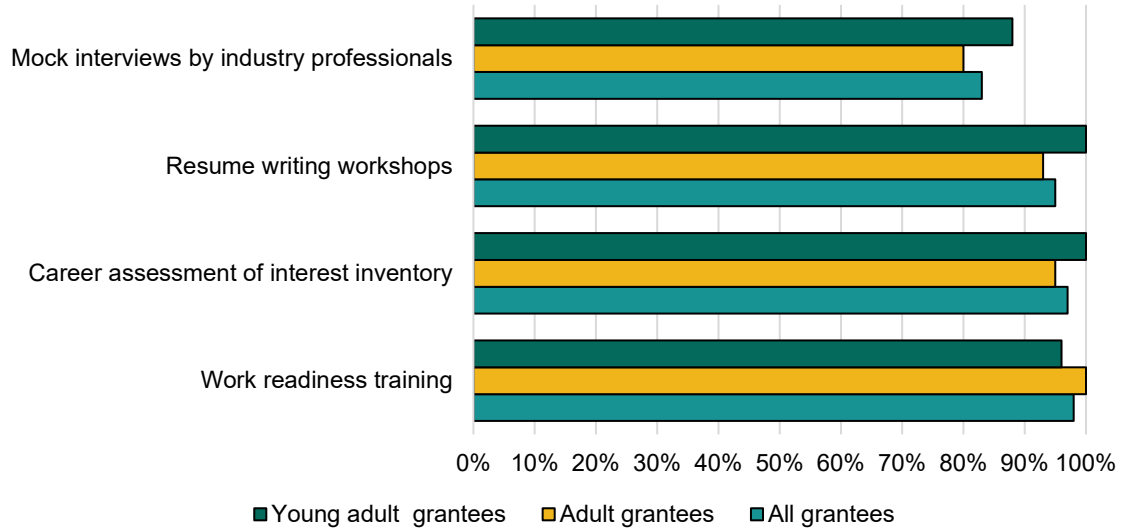
Virtual visits illuminated how the visited sites instituted their staffing approaches for the RP grants. Visited RP sites provided employment services through three staffing models: (1) employing dedicated staff' (2) engaging partners, and (3) dividing employment services staff time between working with participants and employers. Grantee staff at 11 of the visited sites reported employing a dedicated staff person for employment services (that is, employer engagement, job development, job search and placement), while 10 reported having staff that played multiple roles providing these services, and 3 reported using partners for employment service provision. Among the visited sites, 8 reported dividing the employment services staff members' time between working directly with employers (for example, visiting employers in person or going to networking meetings) and working with participants on job search and employment placement.

Although visited RP sites recognized the importance of employment services in helping connect participants to employment, respondents noted that they often struggled to maintain sufficient staffing to support these activities. Among the visited sites, RP staff at eight sites described staffing-related challenges for supporting employment services activities. For example, staff from one of these grantees planned to have a dedicated job developer focused on employer engagement; however, as staff left their positions during the pandemic, remaining staff members needed to focus on case management rather than identifying job leads and facilitating employer partnerships. Another program reported that staff turnover contributed to their lack of consistent partnership with the local workforce development board.

B. Preparing participants for work

RP grantees sought to prepare for participants' employment by delivering services focused on building work-readiness skills. Nearly all grantees that responded to the survey reported providing pre-employment training activities, such as work readiness training and career assessments (Figure VII.1). As reported in the grantee survey, young adult and adult grantees typically offered similar employment-related activities through the RP grants. Young adult grantees more frequently offered mock interviews (88 percent versus 80 percent) and resume writing workshops (100 percent versus 93 percent) than did adult grantees.

Figure VII.1. Percentage of grantees offering employment-related activities through Reentry Project grants, by grant type



Source: Responses from 2018 and 2019 grantee survey (adult grantees, N = 40; young adult grantees, N = 26) question asking, "Which of the following services are offered as part of the RP program?"

Grantees provided a variety of pre-employment training services, either in house, through partners, or both. As reported in the grantee survey, over 50 percent of RP grantees provided these activities in house rather than relying on partners to deliver them. Virtual visits confirmed that sites sought to embed these activities directly in their programming rather than relying on referrals to partner programs. RP program staff from 22 interviewed sites reported building work-readiness services into their program. Pre-employment and work-readiness services included structured pre-employment training courses, expanded courses that covered additional life skills, shortened or individualized work readiness training, and resume development assistance.

1. Structured pre-employment training courses

Fourteen of the visited RP sites reported requiring an initial quick turnaround training program that covered the basics of job searching, including assessment and goal setting, resume development, interview preparation (for example, mock interviews, appropriate attire for interviews), and discussion of behavioral expectations for work sites. RP program staff from these sites report that they usually offered this training soon after participants enroll, with one site providing work readiness services while participants were still in detention. The intensity of the training ranged by program from several days to two weeks, from one hour per day to full-day training. While most of these sites reported providing this training in person, at least four visited sites had moved the training to an online platform due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As discussed in previous chapters, there were mixed experiences with moving RP services online. Program staff from at least three visited sites reported that while they had moved work-readiness courses to online formats during the height of the COVID pandemic, they preferred in-person services because it was harder to engage participants virtually given that they often lacked stable housing and the technology to participate remotely. At least two sites offered certificates to those that completed work-readiness training, such as a computer-skills certificate.

2. Expanded curriculum

Four visited sites reported that they expanded the basic pre-employment training to also cover parenting and family-bonding experiences, computer software, and financial literacy, or they required additional soft-skills training after completion of the initial course. For example, one site required participants to attend additional workshops after the initial basic training, such as financial responsibility workshops and Thinking for Change (a cognitive–behavioral curriculum developed by the National Institute of Corrections that concentrates on changing the criminogenic thinking of offenders). Another site required participants to complete a six-session restorative justice training prior to entering skills-based training.

3. Shortened or individualized work readiness training

Program staff at eight visited sites reported providing work readiness preparation on an individual basis as part of the early case management process, rather than through group cohorts or intensive programming. Program staff at three visited sites discussed less traditional models of training designed to increase participant engagement by shortening it or individualizing it. Program staff at one site shared their efforts to shorten their initial training from one week to three days to better meet participants' needs and retain them in the program. Program staff at another visited site reported that they stopped offering job-readiness classes because of poor attendance and covered these topics in mentoring sessions instead. Program staff at another visited site noted that they referred participants to another community-based organization for life-skills training.

RP program staff from at least two visited sites stressed that an important strategy was creating success along the way through small steps. This included helping participants by providing resources such as new clothes, coaching and emotional support, or obtaining an ID. One program staff member shared the practice of rewarding small successes with incentives to encourage re-entrants and to keep them motivated. An interviewed participant noted, "[the staff's] *main goal is to get the job that you want…. They help you with the little goals first, the reachable stuff first, then step by step until you get there. I think that's what people need, that inspiration*."

4. Resume development assistance

According to site visit respondents, at least 14 sites programs provided resume assistance. Program staff and participants from three of these sites noted the importance of creating concrete resources for participants, such as email addresses and resumes, to help participants take the next step toward searching for a job. Interviewed participants from at least three sites noted that resume assistance was particularly helpful in preparing them for the job-search and placement processes. One interviewed participant expressed that the resume he developed helped him demonstrate his skills and certifications and secure employment: "*The resume was my main struggle and that's what really opened my eyes to the possibilities…. It shows the companies what kind of skills you have. I'd never done a resume before but they were on it … they really helped me out with that. I got a lot of job offers, more than I've ever gotten. Now even though I'm working, I'm still getting calls….*"

C. Developing and maintaining relationships with employers

RP grantees often relied on pre-existing connections with local employers while also working to facilitate partnerships with new employers in their target industries. Among the grantee survey respondents, 31 percent indicated that they established new employer partnerships and 53 percent reported that they established formal partnership agreements with employers. Of the grantees with formal partnership

agreements, "including memorandum of understanding or subcontracts," 71 percent reported they received services or in-kind resources from employers, while 49 percent reported that employers provided guidance on the program strategies and goals. Fewer of these grantees (31 percent) reported receiving referrals from employers to their programs. Reflecting the importance of these employer partnerships in meeting the needs of RP participants, more than 90 percent of grantee survey respondents indicated that the RP grants helped them develop stronger relationships with local employers willing to hire people with criminal records.

RP program staff from 14 visited sites reported that developing personal relationships was key to building strong employer partnerships and that these relationships with employers could be time consuming for staff to build and maintain. Further, these relationships needed ongoing attention and could falter with staff turnover, unsuccessful placements, or lack of communication, according to site visit respondents. In site visit interviews, grantee staff shared strategies they used to conduct outreach and marketing to employers and for building and maintaining existing employer partnerships.

1. Outreach and marketing

RP program staff from visited sites identified the following practices that they used for conducting outreach and marketing to employers:

- **Meeting with employers in person and participating on various boards and coalitions was a strategy discussed by program staff at nine sites.** For example, program staff participated in the local Chamber of Commerce or manufacturer's alliance meetings. A staff member from one of these sites shared that, "Our Job Placement Coordinator is on eight or nine boards, constantly networking with employers."
- **Educating employers and encouraging them to hire justice-involved individuals** was noted as an important strategy by RP program staff from five sites. These staff noted that sharing program information (such as about pre-employment training, the depth of case management support, and other types of supportive services) with employers can help encourage them to hire justice-involved individuals. One program staff at a visited site noted, "The employers just want that assurance that these clients are going to deliver. Sharing success stories, data, and client stories helps." Another program stressed having to be persistent in finding good partners: "*You get a lot of rejection. It's kind of like being a salesman. You have to sell [the program] and our clients and what we have to offer. You're going to deal with a lot of rejection, but when you do get that new employer, or you get the client to connect to the employer … it makes it all worth it*."
- **Thinking of employers as their customers** was a marketing approach shared by programs' employer engagement staff from three sites. These staff described the importance of ensuring that employer needs were met, and that the relationship was mutually beneficial. As one staff member said, *"*Employers believe in our program, but they have something they need from us—we need to deliver an effective and efficient product to the employer." A staff member from another site shared that while it is beneficial to have employers believe in the site's mission, it is more essential that they meet their key business need to hire reliable employees.
- **Identifying employers who themselves have a history of incarceration or include employees with a history of justice-involvement into the fabric of their business model** was identified as an outreach strategy by program staff at four visited sites. A staff member from one of these sites shared that they constantly scanned public media to find these businesses, including local TV news stories.

Another site's staff member said she seeks out employer partners who have had a second chance themselves, because she has found them to be more open to hiring individuals with a justice background. "They will understand what the participant needs, understand their barriers, and support them." A staff member from another site noted that within an employer, the specific hiring manager's experience with second chance employment could make a huge difference in their willingness to hire RP participants. Finally, an employer partner noted that working with their partner RP program was a success because it is "*a benefit anytime we can provide an opportunity to find career track employment and growth opportunities [for justice-involved individuals], it's central to our mission as an organization*."

2. Building on-going partnerships

During interviews, RP program staff from visited sites identified the following practices that they used for maintaining and growing pre-existing or newly established employer partnerships. Commonly used practices included:

- **Holding regular meetings of employer advisory groups** to provide feedback to the program on how trainees and employees were progressing and to cultivate a deeper understanding of "second chance" employment was reported by program staff from six visited sites. One of these sites described having 12 employer partners, each with "a collaborative teaming agreement" that worked to develop strategies for career pathways for program participants. Another described including employers in advisory boards that also included other community partners, such as community colleges and faith-based organizations.
- **Leveraging and building on existing employer networks** that they had developed through related work before receiving their RP grants was reported by four sites. For example, one site described a 20-year relationship with an employer that started long before their RP grant. This employer shared how veteran employees with justice involvement in their backgrounds have been working there for decades and now serve as mentors for RP participants when they start at the company.
- **Demonstrating to employers that they provide on-going support to participants, even after placement,** was shared by RP program staff from four visited sites. Staff at these sites shared the view that employers were more comfortable with the program after they understood the level of support it offered. One RP site reported providing employer/employee mediation services as part of employer support, even extending the service for non-RP employees. Another site reported their successful practices to understand employer needs included RP staff spending time learning about the employer's policies (for example, through review of their employee handbook) and on-site at the location of the employer, noting that, "Employers love having that extra hand with their human resource staff."
- **Collaborating with employers on training content and whether a participant is ready for job placement** was shared as an important practice by employment partners from at least three visited sites. One site's employer partner noted the importance of being able to give direct input into training was an important feature of their collaboration and having employer staff as trainers ensured that the quality and content of training met their needs. Another employer noted that after they worked directly with RP program staff to ensure that candidates sent to them were "work ready," the quality of candidates improved. Two employers expressed that the partnerships with their site helped support their business needs, as well as created opportunities for RP participants. One employer stated, "*When looking at talent acquisition you have to get creative. There are people who are ready to work who*

have barriers and we found that if we can develop partnerships with organizations that are supporting individuals to become work ready, it supports a need for the community, it supports a need for participants, but it also supports a need for us."

D. Job-development services

While a focus on developing partnerships with employers was discussed by half the visited sites, fewer of these sites reported robust job-development activities, such as identifying labor market trends, engaging employers in formal partnerships, and finding sustainable jobs for program participants. Program staff at seven visited sites reported engaging in job-development services, and several program staff noted that it takes an investment in staff time to develop deep partnerships with employers that result in job creation for RP participants. These RP staff identified the following practices that they used in job-development services:

- **Partnering with the local workforce development system** for job development and placement services in specific industries was shared by program staff from six visited programs. For example, one program partnered with their local AJC to support employers completing the paperwork for incentives, such as fair-chance hiring that enabled small businesses to hire participants.
- **Building trust through ongoing communication** was identified by employment development staff at three of these programs. Employer engagement staff from one program reported that the work went beyond job fair attendance to developing a process of building trust through ongoing communication. His employer partners agreed, noting that "job fairs are not enough; it takes relationships like the one I have with the Lead Employment Development Specialist—that's how it really happens." Another employer partner also highlighted the importance of open communication with the lead employment development specialist, noting that his communication with the RP staff about concerns with candidate preparation resulted in improved quality of referred candidates.
- **Hosting or attending job fairs** to connect participants to employers was reported by program staff from two visited programs. One program worked with an employer to set up a job fair to highlight their employment opportunities to participants.

E. Job search and placement services

As part of their grant agreement, RP grantees worked to achieve a 70 percent placement rate of participants in unsubsidized employment, apprenticeship, or post-secondary education (U.S. DOL 2018, 2019). Helping participants find and obtain work through job-search and placement assistance was commonly offered by RP grantees. All but one of the visited RP sites reported providing job-search assistance as part of their program. These sites shared various approaches to providing job-search and placement services, including basic job-search training and guidance, intensive job-search support, directly connecting participants with employers with job openings, and job placement and support.

Basic job-search assistance took several forms, including assisting with online search engines and applications, and tailoring resumes for job applications. Typically, sites built on their job readiness training services to support participants who were seeking employment, either during or after completing training. This support came in the form of updating and tailoring resumes for specific positions, sending out resumes or other necessary paperwork such as certification documentation, assisting participants to set up job-search accounts on websites (such as Indeed), and helping them to apply for jobs on these sites. For example, sites built on findings from participant assessments to match participants' skillsets with jobs

that are a good fit. One program described using assessment tools to determine job locations and the need for those jobs. Then staff used Salesforce[21], which has a job matching piece, so after they enter a skillset into SalesForce, they could identify the types of jobs that might be a good fit for a participant.

1. Intensive job-search support

Six visited sites shared the strategy of providing intensive support to teach participants how to search for jobs with the goal of building independence and the capacity of participants in job searching. As one program described it, RP staff would sit with participants while they created an account in the state workforce system's online labor exchange, ensure that their resume was updated in the system, and then model how to search for positions using that tool. Staff would assist on a handful of applications, and then they expected participants to continue applying on their own. Another visited program's staff shared examples of helping prepare participants for interviews for specific openings or with specific employers.

Interviewed participants from two sites spoke positively about the direct assistance they received from staff when applying for jobs. These participants explained that staff guided them and filled out applications together either by sharing screens on the computer or sitting down with them one on one. Another interviewed participant expressed that program staff prepared participants with the tools needed to find employment, noting that "[program staff] *trains you for the interviews and how to conduct yourself. They don't help you get a job, because when you go to the job interview, they are not there, you need to use the skills they gave you*."

2. Job placement and retention assistance

Job placement assistance was also reported as an important employment-focused service by RP program staff at 16 visited sites. They stressed that their programs build up to employment, with all the previous steps—assessment, goal setting, and training—leading up to job placement. Six sites reported relying on partnerships with workforce development agencies to place participants (for example, referring participants to the AJC for placement in certain industries.) Three sites partnered with staffing agencies to quickly place participants in employment. Program staff at one visited site noted that some of the more well-paying employers will only hire through that service.

Program staff at visited sites shared various strategies that they implemented to support successful job placement and retention, including:

- **Connecting participants directly to employers for applications and interviews.** At least six sites focused on connecting participants directly to employers for job applications and interviews. One program shared that their approach was to conduct employer outreach in the community, then connect participants to established employer partners who were a match. Another site explained that they connected participants directly to employers upon completion of skills training, such as forklift operator training. An interviewed participant from this site shared his experience of staff connecting him to an employer after completing training, receiving support to develop a resume, and interview preparation. He described how this support prepared him well, and that he secured employment in the field where he received his training certification. After training completion, staff connected him to an employer who then reached out to him for an interview. Staff provided resume assistance and prepared him for the interview: "*They helped me build a resume … interview questions they gave me*

[21] Salesforce is a management information system used by some RP sites to track participant information.

a big packet, 50 pages long, filled with interview questions and I studied it. By the time I got to the interview, I knew what was coming, and answered questions right."

- **Supporting strengths-based career exploration.** RP program staff at five sites identified the importance of using a strengths-based strategy, where they followed the lead of the participant, letting their areas of interest and motivations guide the job placement process. RP program staff at these sites described their strengths-based approach as a process of identifying participants' talents and interests as they move through the program, starting with assessment, then during training and coaching sessions. As program staff at one visited site explained, "*Collaboration with the participants has proved to be a successful strategy. Working with the participant to identify their strengths and interests sets the foundation to success when choosing a career path*."
- **Continued support to participants following job placement.** Program staff from at least five visited sites reported providing participants with continued access to services and follow-up calls or meetings after placement as often as weekly and then gradually tapering off to once a month or less. One RP program staff described how, after job placement, the employment and training specialist continued to check in with participants and employers to resolve issues and support job retention. Program staff from one visited site continued to provide participants with access to employment placement staff after being placed in their first post-program job for 12 months. They also provided weekly job clubs for participants to provide peer support to one another.

RP program staff and employer partners from 12 visited sites shared that their most successful collaboration, resulting from these approaches, can lead to repeat placement of participants. RP program staff at one site shared participant resumes directly with an employer, who then followed up with an interview, even before participants applied directly; the employer had hired three RP participants this way.

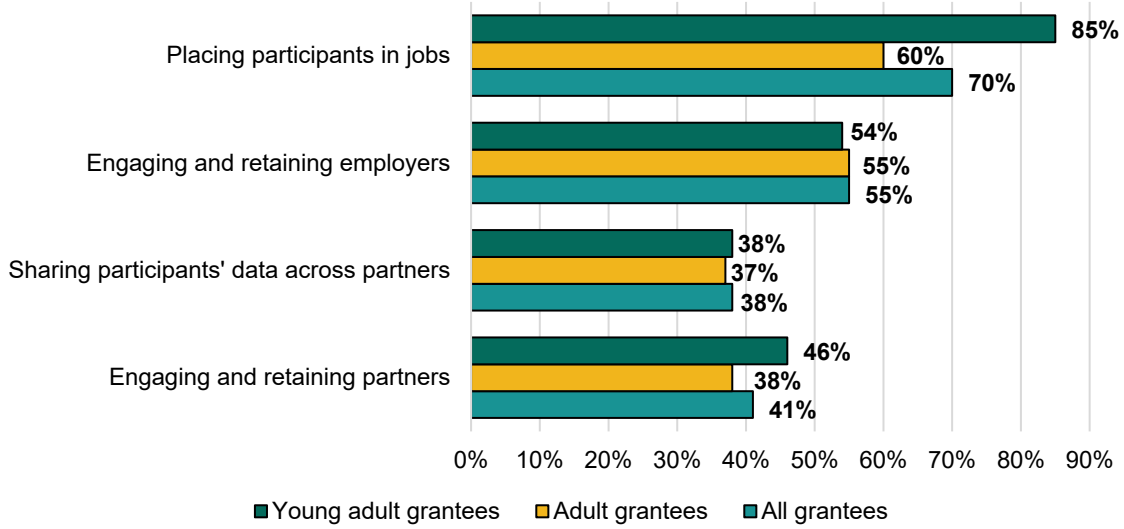
F. Employment services successes and challenges

During site visit interviews, RP program staff, employer partners, and participants shared their reflections on success and challenges in providing employment-related services. Responses to the grantee survey highlighted challenges that employment services staff likely faced in their roles. Based on the survey, 55 percent of grantee respondents highlighted engaging and retaining employers as challenging, and 70 percent identified placing participants in jobs as challenging. Job placement appeared to be particularly difficult for young adult grantees, as 85 percent of young adult grantees, compared to 60 percent of adult grantees, identified it as challenging.

1. Reported challenges

The most common challenge reported in the grantee survey concerned placing participants into employment (70 percent) and engaging and retaining employers (55 percent). Notably, programs reported fewer challenges with other aspects of employment-related services, such as engaging other partners or providing employment-related activities to participants (Figure VII.2).

Figure VII.2. Percentage of Reentry Project grantees reporting employment-related service challenges, by grant type



Source: Responses from 2018 and 2019 grantee survey (adult grantees, N = 40; young adult grantees, N = 26) asking, "How challenging are each of the following…"

Virtual visit data provide more detail on challenges in job placement and other employment services experienced by program staff, employer partners, and participants. Site visit respondent-identified challenges include:

- **Resolving participant transportation needs so they can get to a job location.** RP program staff, employer partners, and interviewed participants from 11 sites identified transportation as a substantial barrier for participants to reach work locations and that this was challenging for programs to address. As discussed in Chapter V, RP sites reported that participants often did not have a driver's license or access to a personal vehicle even if they did. Often, public transportation was not available or was inadequate to get participants to their jobs at the time of their work shifts; if it was available, participants working the night shift may not feel safe using it. One interviewed participant shared that, "Not having transportation makes people unable to keep a job, make it to an interview, get a work uniform, and show up prepared."
- **Addressing participant needs for immediate earnings while they were in training.** One challenge noted by program staff at six sites related to the pressure for participants to start earning money right away, rather than being able to fully focus on training activities. As one staff member stated, "*There is a tension between meeting the desire of participants to find a job and start working quickly and supporting participants to put in the time upfront to complete their training and receive a credential that will benefit them in the long-term*." Often, participants had to maintain employment, frequently in low-paying work, while also engaging in training and job-search activities. One program staff member described these jobs as "taxi jobs"—employment that is more about earning income than connecting to a real career path—often involving manual labor and lower pay. Staff expressed that this can be a first step and that "participants can move on and upward afterward."
- **Identifying high-quality jobs that provide livable wages.** Interviewed participants from four sites highlighted the importance of quality jobs with living wages and opportunities for growth and

advancement. One of those participants was offered $9 per hour at her initial job placement, which she described as "hard to swallow." Although she later moved on to a higher-paying job with another employer, she had to accept the initial placement to meet probation requirements. A second interviewed participant from that same site expressed that pay was important for feeling valued and appreciated.

- **Overcoming perceived labor market discrimination.** RP program staff from at least five sites shared that ageism and systemic racism were barriers for participants to securing employment. One program staff discussed bias of some employers in that they do not see justice-involved employees as potential for supervisory roles, stating, "the only way we can do that is to humanize and raise their value in the eyes of the employer." An employer partner noted that hiring inequities in the building trades could create barriers to employment: "*We have a problem with DEI [diversity, equity, and inclusion]. How do we expose people who weren't exposed to construction—whose uncles, brothers, etc. weren't in construction?"*
- **Supporting participants' mental health needs.** Finally, program staff from at least three sites discussed the mental conditioning and trauma related to incarceration as a challenge for some participants, especially when encountering interpersonal conflict or stress on the job. Two employers saw this displayed through low confidence and self-esteem of participants, especially young adults. Both employers felt that one of their responsibilities was to encourage participants and help them build their confidence. One employer mentioned that because participants had been through a lot, they tended to be "hard shells to crack." Another employer explained that participants "*don't have very strong self-esteem in most cases, so you have to build them up. They may also not recognize their potential*."

2. Identified successes

RP program staff, employer partners and participants at visited sites shared multiple perceived successes that supported the achievement of the main objective of the program—stable employment at livable wages.

- **Twelve employer partners from visited sites shared success stories about coordinating closely with RP program staff to support new employees.** One employer shared that "*it's like we have a lifeline. We can get insight into how to make things better… so that's an advantage to having a partnership like this, we can have this person succeed*."
- **Ten employer partners interviewed during site visits shared their satisfaction with the employees they hired through their partnership with the RP site.** They noted that their employees hired through RP programs are motivated, well prepared, reliable, and "rooted in the community"—from the community in which the business is located.

"RP graduates are more prepared for work than employees referred from other programs or from the general community."

"Justice-involved individuals have a strong desire not to repeat offenses in most cases. They are just a normal individual. It's really just about their internal motivations."

— Employer partners

- **Interviewed participants from seven visited sites expressed that the support and guidance they receive in the program allowed them to gain employment and helped them recover from difficult experiences.** One interviewed participant said, "*the people at [the program] made me feel good [about myself] and … that I can provide a good future for myself and my daughter*."
- **RP program staff from three visited sites defined success as helping people "get back on their feet, get stability, training and then jobs."** One RP program staff member shared that they believed their biggest successes are when they helped participants obtain jobs that lead to sustainable wages. The staff member shared that the work can be life changing for some participants, and this spurs staff to keep doing the work, despite the many challenges and setbacks that participants experience. One program staff member described success as "*placing participants in good jobs and [seeing] them flourishing. When you see participants turn their life around in a relatively short period of time [it is] very powerful and gratifying*."

VIII. Looking Forward

The 2018 and 2019 RP grants had a widespread reach with CBO and intermediary organizations enrolling more than 15,000 young adult and adult participants across 34 states, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico with the aim of helping these individuals find and retain stable employment and avoid entering, or in most cases, reentering the criminal justice system. As this report has also described, these RP grantees experienced varying degrees of success in implementing their programs: hiring and training staff; developing new services or expanding existing ones; finding and engaging partners; recruiting and enrolling participants; delivering case management and supportive services; and working to help participants engage in education, training, and employment-focused services. This final chapter highlights various successes and challenges as identified by grantees at both the participant- and program-level and looks at issues around sustainability and provides some site-driven insights for future reentry programming. Research questions for this study are addressed through a series of RP evaluation products.[22] The chapter closes with a look ahead at the additional deliverables to be completed as part of this study.

A. Reported challenges and successes when working with participants

According to the WIPS data, 71 percent of participants (82 percent of adult and 60 percent of young adult participants) had exited from their RP program by the end of 2021. The length of time from entry to exit varied with more than half of adult participants (52 percent) and a third of young adult participants (33 percent) existing within three quarters of entry (see Table VIII.1). While the WIPS data does not reveal why participants exited, grantees reported challenges in keeping participants engaged in programming. When asked about the biggest successes and challenges in working with participants to implement the RP grants, site visit respondents highlighted two substantial challenges as well as a range of successes. These reported challenges and successes mirror and expand upon those highlighted in prior chapters.

Table VIII.1. Timing of Reentry Project participant program exit, by participant target population

Exit timing	All participants (N = 17,361)	Adult participants (N = 9,098)	Young adult participants (N = 8,263)
Within 1 quarter of entry	10.0%	13.7%	5.9%
Within 2 quarters of entry	18.4%	22.6%	13.9%
Within 3 quarters of entry	14.4%	15.6%	13.0%
Within 4 quarters of entry	9.6%	10.1%	9.0%
Within 5 or more quarters of entry	18.9%	19.6%	18.2%
Has not exited	28.6%	18.3%	40.0%

Source: Workforce Integrated Performance System data, July 1, 2018–December 31, 2021 (N = 17,361).

[22] Additional products developed for the Reentry Project evaluation are available here: https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasp/evaluation/completedstudies/Reentry-Projects-Grant-Evaluation.

1. Challenges meeting participants' basic needs

When asked about the biggest participant-level challenges faced during implementation, respondents from 22 sites spoke about participants' unmet basic needs. In particular, they reported only limited access to stable housing (12 sites), mental health- and trauma-based services (12 sites), and transportation (11 sites). Respondents from at least one site each also mentioned participants confronting a lack of food, a lack of work cloths, and limited financial literacy skills. As discussed in Chapters VI and VII, grantees indicated that participants with unmet basic needs often could not engage or stay engaged in RP services such as education, training, and employment services, and they also have difficulty finding and retaining employment.

Addressing these needs was clearly important to RP grantees. Not only was identification of unmet needs a key component of case management, but 77 percent of surveyed grantees provided some form of housing services (with 27 percent offering them directly and 27 percent referring participants to partners for housing assistance). Staff members from three sites, one intermediary, and participants from five sites talked during interviews about the importance of these basic needs services for assisting participants through the program. One staff respondent, for example, explicitly referenced their ability to remove participant barriers as a huge success of the RP grant. A participant from another program expressed how, while the program's main goal was to get participants employed, "they help you with the little goals first, the reachable stuff first, then step by step until you get there."

Despite extensive supportive service offerings and their perceived value by staff and participants, study data suggest that these services may not have been enough to address participants' needs. As noted in Chapter V, fewer than one-third of participants received supportive services, and staff from 10 sites and two intermediaries discussed in interviews how they would have liked additional support in addressing basic needs. One of the main concerns raised during these interviews were the limitations on spending grant funds on basic needs, meaning that RP programs needed to rely extensively on partners to provide many of these services rather than being able to deliver these services themselves.

2. Challenges engaging participants and maintaining their interest

Site visit respondents also highlighted challenges with participant engagement. Site staff found that they were often insufficiently able to motivate participants to enroll in the RP program in the first place or to keep them engaged and motivated once they were enrolled. Despite this challenge, interview respondents shared a number of approaches that they perceived as helpful to address this issue.

a. Enrolling participants

Despite enrolling a large number of participants, many 2018 and 2019 grantees were unable to reach the enrollment goals established with DOL. According to WIPS data for 2018 grantees, 80 percent of adult grantees and 44 percent of young adult grantees reached their individual grant enrollment goal. For 2019 grantees, 58 percent of adult grantees and 35 percent of young adult grantees achieved their enrollment target.[23] As described during site visits, the COVID pandemic played a critical role, isolating grantees from referral sources, deterring new participants from enrolling, release and requiring grantees to serve participants remotely once enrolled. As one interview respondent explained, many of their grantee's referral partners, such as probation and parole offices, were closed during the peak of the pandemic. The justice system partner for another site also described how correctional institutions were often scrambling

[23] Five grantees were excluded from percentages due to missing WIPS data.

to individuals from incarceration due to COVID-19 pandemic and did not always have the time or opportunity to make sure that those individuals were connected to programs like RP.

Twelve sites also described other kinds of struggles they had in meeting their enrollment goals. Five sites reported that they wished they would have been more aggressive in their recruitment efforts overall; they needed to have started recruitment efforts earlier, recruited longer, or needed to have expanded their recruitment efforts more widely within their communities. For three sites, the challenge involved convincing people of the benefits of the program, especially the value of the investment in training rather than just finding work. Staff members from three other sites discussed challenges obtaining documentation and paperwork for potential participants (including identification and right-to-work paperwork). Staff from the remaining site attributed their enrollment challenges to limited direct contact with potential participants stemming from the pandemic.

Despite these challenges, respondents from four sites indicated that meeting their enrollment goals was one of their overall successes. The program staff suggested two main reasons why they were able to meet these goals, including setting up and engaging partners to ensure a steady set of participant referrals (2 sites) and building a good reputation in the community such that participants would refer others to the program (3 sites). As one staff member said, "Word of mouth is absolutely critical…. If a client shares something with another, that's gospel."

b. Keeping participants motivated and engaged

RP grantee perceived promising approaches to maintaining participant engagement

1. **Listening, understanding, and not judging (14 sites)**
   "Being an active listener and understanding backgrounds is very important."
   "We need more of the individuals' voices driving the services."
   "It's not what we want, but what the participant needs."
2. **Ensuring that staff were supportive (9 sites)**
   "I had someone there to help me, that really cared about me, and that was being genuine with me."
3. **Finding ways to stay in touch (7 sites)**
   "Constant contact is what works. If you don't follow up, they are gone. You have to have constant communication."
4. **Noting incremental changes or successes (4 sites)**
   "Participants need instant gratification to help them see the end of the tunnel."
   "Count what you see as successes and not only the failures…."
5. **Hiring staff with lived experience (4 sites)**
   "It is so inspirational to see people who have been through the same situation and turned it around."

Source: Virtual site visits (N = 27).

Once participants were enrolled in RP, program staff from 16 sites described how it could be difficult to keep them engaged. Staff members from 12 of these sites found it particularly challenging to keep the attention of young adults and sustain their motivation. They described the young adult population as not wanting to work, not yet thinking about the type of life stability that more education and training promised, not completing training once begun, and generally having a short-term mindset about personal change. One staff member described this as the "microwave principle," with young adults assuming that things will change in just two to three weeks when often it can take much longer. Respondents from three sites also pointed to difficulty keeping track of participants given frequent moves and changes in contact information. Respondents from five sites discussed some strategies they used to keep participants engaged,

including providing incentives (3 sites), trying to keep the tone of service delivery communication respectful (1 site), and trying to identify the most motivated individuals to enroll (1 site).

3. Reported successes helping participants complete program services

Program staff and participants from 23 sites discussed during site visit interviews their perceived successes in achieving positive outcomes for participants or themselves. While a future report will examine data on participant outcomes and impacts, the following anecdotal reports highlight the types of outcomes that program staff, partners, and participants viewed as making their programs successful.

a. Helping participants shift their mindset

When highlighting their most important program successes, partners and participants from 11 sites discussed helping participants change their perspectives. One staff member talked about how they helped participants open their minds to the possibilities of completing training or finding work and helped them believe in themselves and their ability to be successful in things they previously felt they could not achieve. Program training partners for another site noticed personal growth and maturity in how the young participants started to believe in themselves. A staff member for another program explained that aspects of the RP program may be the only things that some participants have ever completed, making it critical to help them to see that as important. Finally, participants noted shifts in mindset during interviews. One individual noted how he had an "incarcerated mindset" when he was first released and that his work in the program helped open his mind to reentering society by being more patient and thinking more positively. A participant from another program noted that, at the time of enrollment, she was not worried about her life or what she should be doing with it. Program staff helped her focus and set her life on the right track.

b. Connecting participants to education and training

Interview respondents, including program staff and participants, from 15 sites indicated that some of their programs' greatest successes were helping participants to complete education and training services and to obtain degrees and certifications. Five sites mentioned the success of helping participants obtain a high school diploma or high school equivalency certification. Most notable was how, in nine sites, staff and participants pointed to the importance of obtaining a certificate in a wide range of fields, as well as the opportunities having certificates opened up to them. As one staff member put it, "Referrals, gas cards, bus tickets, job supports are all good, but this certification puts you above the other applicants for those jobs." Another staff member explained that some participants were hired immediately because they had relevant certification.

c. Helping participants prepare for and find employment

Four sites noted the importance of preparing participants for work either through completion of work readiness coursework; resume preparation; or helping them obtain paperwork, such as a driver's license or other identification. Additionally, helping participants find and retain jobs was one of the greatest successes noted in interviews with 17 sites. Staff members from four sites also described helping participants find jobs with the potential for advancement. Respondents also spoke about why employment was important and what it meant for participants' lives. For example, one staff person noted how "we provide them with the means to be financially successful and reintegrate with their families." Another staff member conveyed that, after a participant obtained a full-time job, she highlighted that achievement

by showing the participant the essay from their application that said: "I come from nothing and want to get enough money to raise my son." A staff member for a different site described how "seeing participants secure employment is a big accomplishment," given the discrimination that young adults with justice involvement face in trying to find work. Another staff member described how he knows a participant has succeeded when they get "past the point of being scared of having a job or dreading it" and when "they are now comfortable in that environment" and no longer complain about the typical day-to-day headaches, like a challenging boss or an annoying customer. This kind of transformation signaled to the staff member that a participant had shifted away from crisis patterns.

d. Reducing recidivism

When asked about implementation successes, staff members and participants from seven sites mentioned low rates of recidivism. Staff, however, did not provide details about what they perceived as contributing to that success. While other sites did not specifically call out low rates of recidivism as a success, at least four sites reported tracking participants and finding low rates of recidivism. As a participant from one of the seven sites noted, "This program saved me and my little brother a lot. My brother was in a gang and now he is not because of the program."

B. Reported challenges and successes developing and implementing programs

Beyond the challenges and successes that programs highlighted when working directly with participants, they also reported on the implementation challenges and successes they experienced at the program level. Five main topics emerged during site visits.

1. Reported successes in partnership building

Staff members of 17 sites reported that growing and building these partnerships were the greatest implementation successes their programs experienced. In terms of partner types, respondents most frequently discussed success building partnerships with the justice system (8 sites) and employers (6 sites). While less common, program staff also mentioned building partnerships with college and training provider organizations (3 sites), workforce system providers (3 sites), and CBO and supportive service providers (1 site).

Interviews with program staff from a different set of 17 sites—13 of which are included above and 4 that experienced challenges building partnerships—yielded insights into the process of building partnerships that may be informative to other organizations building similar types of programs. One theme raised by site visit interview respondents in eight sites was the importance of identifying partners and individuals who understood participant needs, genuinely cared about them, and were a good fit for the training and career interests of participants. Staff members from four sites discussed that it was critical for partners to have staff with their own connections who were willing to reach out to new organizations to continue building the partnership. The importance of communication and the sharing of information across partners was raised by staff members from two sites. Withholding information or simply being unavailable could create strains on partnerships. Finally, staff members from four sites noted that programs must realize that partnerships cannot be short lived. They discussed the importance of building the infrastructure needed to maintain lasting partnerships in support of a community, whether the partnership was with an individual staff person or an organization more broadly. As one staff member described their partnerships, "you're in it for the long-haul, even beyond the grants."

2. Challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic

Site visit respondents from 17 sites mentioned COVID as one of the biggest implementation challenges that they faced. Overall, many of the obstacles that respondents from these 17 sites said arose due to COVID were similar to the issues that have been discussed in prior chapters, including how the COVID pandemic strained partner communications and relationships when partners closed down during the pandemic (4 sites), made it difficult to recruit and enroll participants (4 sites), and closed programs or lead to staff being out of the office for illness (2 sites), further diminishing a program's service delivery capacity when other aspects of service delivery were already strained. Nine sites explicitly discussed the process of switching from in-person to virtual service delivery (for example, video platforms, phone contacts, and others). As one staff member put it, "The effect was the loss of a sense of community." The staff member also described that it resulted in more distracted participants and the need to relearn how to work with people: "*There were too many distractions not working in person, you want their full focus so they can process and make a decision about their future. Some people will give you a whole story, other people will give you a one-word answer. I had to learn how to read people*."

Despite challenges, staff members for four sites (two of which also discussed challenges) pointed to at least some positive aspects of this switch to virtual service delivery due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff members for one site talked about being able to widen the range of services by giving participants access to classes at other locations. A staff member at another site discussed how virtual communication could help alleviate the burden on individuals, especially for minor meetings for which coming into an office required a substantial amount of time, so that staff could better focus on the important interactions when they met with participants in person.

3. Challenges with staffing

Staffing was an ongoing challenge in 10 sites. Interview respondents in these sites pointed to high rates of staff turnover or difficulty filling positions. If the program was understaffed, sites pointed to undue pressure on remaining staff and reductions in available services, as well as challenges maintaining ongoing communication with partners or the ability to give participants the attention that they needed to address both basic needs or complete key program services. A related staffing challenge that respondents also discussed was making sure that there was a proper staff-to-participant ratio (to meet the needs of participants), which was difficult to maintain as programs ramped up or down with the start or end of their grants.

4. Challenges with community building or reputation

Staff members for six sites indicated that building a program's reputation within the community was a substantial implementation challenge. While closely related, this challenge was somewhat different than the challenge of building partnerships, as highlighted above. In particular, staff for three sites discussed the importance of building the reputation of the organization within the community and becoming a known entity among those already supportive of reentry work. Doing so was important for building partnerships and establishing the organizational credibility, but it also helped to get the word out to participants. One staff member described the challenge stating, "*You really have to market it. You have to throw a big party for the judges, you know. You have to market the program so that people will send you the individuals sitting up there in the courts…. Also marketing in terms of a commercial that comes on once a month, or trying to get into the school system*." A broader consideration raised by staff and partners at five of these sites was the challenge of shifting the community mindset about working with

individuals who are justice-system involved. Shifting mindsets was reported as important to attract employers, funders, and other stakeholders to support a program and make it possible to move participants into more stable lives.

5. Other challenges

Staff members from eight sites pointed to other implementation challenges. Respondents from two sites discussed the challenges of adapting programs to the right age group, especially for adult programs trying to learn to work with young adults. Staff members from four sites discussed challenges in learning to work with the data systems or paperwork required by DOL, which they found long and complicated and not particularly efficient to use. As one staff person noted, "*reports coming out of the system do not match our data" so "we run a report and see what it says, fix something, and then rerun it and rerun it again."* Finally, staff members at four sites found it challenging to identify the right types of employment and training opportunities for an area and a population. This involved making sure that training and employment requirements were not too burdensome for participants to achieve and developing training to fit the needs of the local economy.

C. Grantee perspectives on sustainability

While sustainability was not an explicit goal of the grant, respondents were asked during site visit interviews whether they planned to sustain their programs beyond the RP grants. As noted in earlier chapters, grantees had substantial related experience prior to the grants that may have influenced their plans for sustainability. Most notably, 44 percent of all grantees indicated in the grantee survey that they had operated a reentry program similar to RP prior to the grant, and 92 percent had at least some experience working with justice-involved populations prior to receipt of their RP grant.

- Based on respondent interviews, at least 23 of the 27 sites were holding conversations at the time of the site visits about ways to sustain their programs beyond the RP grant. Of these sites, seven planned to continue their programs more or less as they were operated under RP. Staff members at seven other sites indicated that they planned to operate their programs in a somewhat reduced manner or at least with a few adjustments, mostly based on their inability to fund their programs at the same level as RP. Staff members another nine sites had not yet developed a particular plan for sustaining services.
- Staff members at 15 sites mentioned potential funding to help sustain their programs at the end of their RP grants, including foundations (4 sites); other federal sources (5 sites); state and local government agencies (6 sites); various local and private sources, such as donations (5 sites); and through coordination/co-enrollment with workforce partners (2 sites). According to program staff, at least 3 sites were still exploring additional funding. One site was looking into ways to monetize its services by selling its curriculum to other programs.
- Along with new funding comes an opportunity to redesign programs. Staff members from seven sites suggested a number of changes they would make around training programs. Two sites were considering ways to reduce the costs of training programs and services more generally. One site was examining ways to offer shorter training and four sites were considering ways to better align training with job opportunities. Staff members for two intermediary organizations also reported that they and their subgrantees were struggling to identify ways to adapt their program models to compete with so many other providers seeking similar funding.

D. Considerations for future programing

During site visit interviews, respondents were asked to share practices and approaches to implementing their RP from which other programs might learn. Staff shared five general lessons.

1. Importance of sufficient funding and flexibility

During site visit interviews, staff members from 11 sites suggested that programs might have benefited from a greater flexibility in how grant funds could be used or increased supplemental funding to cover certain types of costs.

- **Greater capacity to address unmet participant needs.** Consistent with responses on implementation challenges, staff members for 10 sites discussed the need to have more reentry funding available to cover participants' unmet basic needs, such as mental health services, transportation, and housing.
- **Modifications to outcome measures.** Staff members from three sites discussed a desire for more flexibility in performance measures of participant outcomes. Staff from one site wanted additional time to capture outcomes to allow participants to move through services at a slower pace. Staff from the second site thought it would be helpful to have greater flexibility on the definition of data measures, such as certifications, given the need to enroll participants through relatively short training programs. Staff from the third site indicated interest in counting the completion of services, especially career services, as milestones (in addition to the complete of certificates, employment, and so on), thus providing an interim measure of accomplishment.

2. Reported need to modify program structure and length

Staff members from eight sites discussed the need for modifying the overall service delivery period as a way of helping them better address participant needs. More specifically, staff members from four sites discussed *modifying the program to begin pre-release* as a means of helping participants complete some services before getting out, including helping them change their mindset and address basic needs so that they would be better prepared to find work when they do come out. Staff members from three sites also discussed *having a longer grant planning period*—changing it from three months to six months—with the understanding that the three-month period is too short to build out certain partnerships. As with the conversation above about performance measures, staff members for two sites pointed to *having a longer overall performance period* to give them sufficient time to impact a participant's life by getting them through all needed services.

3. Reported need to work better with participants

Staff members from eight sites shared various approaches they learned while implementing their programs for working participants that they wanted to highlight. These included:[24]

- Being selective when screening participants and enrolling committed individuals (3 sites)
- Engaging participants in the service and career planning process and not simply directing them through RP services (2 sites)

[24] Counts are not mutually exclusive.

- Setting clear expectations for helping participants understand the overall goals and timeline of their service plans (2 sites), which helped site staff promote motivation and engagement among participants
- Creating longer orientation timelines to fully address participants' career options (1 site)
- Ensuring that certificates offered through the grants align with the training needs of local employers (1 site)

4. Reported need for broader thinking around reentry program management

Staff members for six sites suggested helpful ways for other programs to think about the ways they plan and manage reentry programs to account for the complex needs of participants and the many different partnerships needed to operate these programs.

- **Remaining flexible and being ready to pivot.** Staff members for three of these sites talked about the importance of being flexible and being able to pivot when something happens. They mentioned the many challenges of navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, but there were also natural disasters or similarly big interruptions that might completely derail the implementation of a program and require work with the funder to rethink how it is going to operate. They also discussed adapting their approaches and partnerships in response to interruptions. For example, rather than providing a service directly such as substance abuse treatment, it might be preferable to pivot to a partnership if a site discovers a strong network of providers it did not previously know about.
- **Having a long-term vision for the program.** Staff members for three sites discussed the importance of operating a program like this for the long term. As one person put it, implementation is "a marathon, not a sprint." An important way to approach this was that grants like RP should be part of a larger picture of the work grantees do. One staff person recommended that others should "*take grants [like RP] as learning opportunities. They're not the end goal. They're opportunities to build your own capacity and connections to the community. We build policies on the backs of those grants … and refine models*."

5. A need to work more effectively with program partners

Staff members from five sites talked about the general lessons to partnership building that they gleaned from their implementation process, many of which mirror the successes and challenges highlighted above but take a slightly broader approach. These include acknowledging that building partnerships takes time and requires a lot of attention (4 sites), whether it is working through the DOL-approved provider list, setting up intermediary staff, or making sure systems are in place to deal with the partnership; recognizing the extremely critical role of good employer partnerships (1 site), which as someone put it amounts to "without the employers, you can't do anything"; and also recognizing the importance of having strong probation or parole partner staff to help to reinforce ideas with participants since those individuals have regular access to program participants (1 site).

E. Next steps for the RP evaluation

Following this report, the study team has two additional sets of deliverables. The first is a series of briefing papers also focused on implementation. These briefing papers, which will be released around the time of this report, will focus especially on practitioner audiences and are designed to share additional details from the implementation study in short, topical papers that address work-based learning strategies, participant perspectives, differences among grantees serving adults versus young adults, and participant perspectives on the RP grants. The second deliverable will be the study's impact study report, which will examine whether program services have a positive impact on key participants' outcomes, such as placement in employment, wages, and various measures of recidivism. That final impact study report will be completed in 2024.

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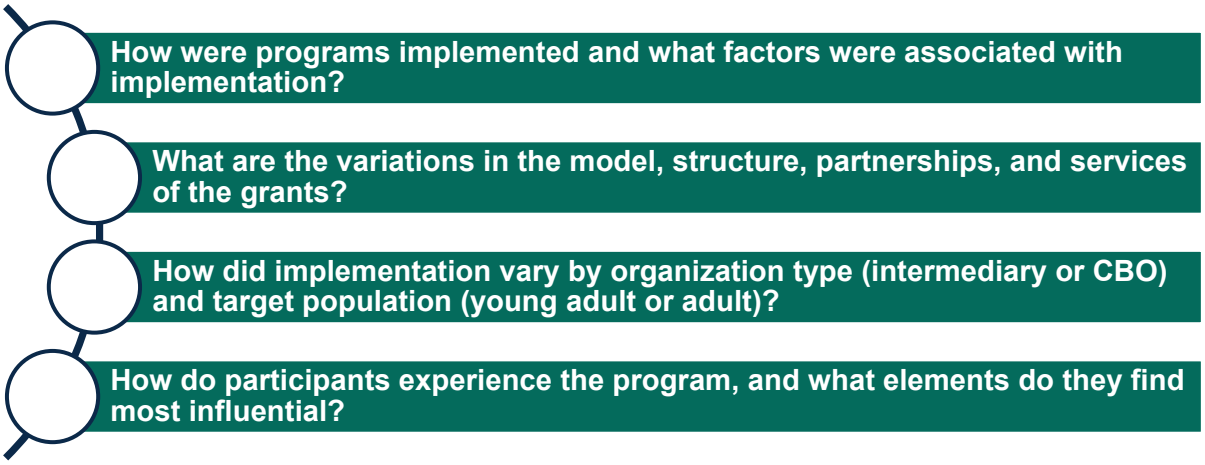
Technical Appendix

The following appendix describe the approach to data collection and analysis that the evaluation team used as part of this implementation study for the Reentry Project (RP) Grant Evaluation.

A. Goals and research questions

The implementation study had three main goals: (1) describe the structure of RP grant funded services over the 2018 and 2019 grant cycles[25], including how funding was used during these cycles, the ways in which grantees operated their programs, and the services grantees delivered, (2) highlight unique and potentially promising strategies, as reported by the grantees, to support justice-system involved individuals, including strategies that grantees used during the COVID-19 pandemic, and (3) inform the interpretation of impact study results by identifying structural differences across programs (e.g., organization type, service delivery models, target population) as well as variations in implementation (e.g., slower or faster to start enrollment, shutdowns due to COVID-19, etc.).[26] To drive data collection and analysis, the study team developed the research questions shown in Figure A.1.

Figure A.1. Reentry Project evaluation implementation study research questions



[25] The study originally intended to include 2017 grantees, but information from the WIPS data was insufficient and for parity, the study team also removed 2017 grantee survey data from this report. Due to timing, site visits only included 2018 and 2019 grantees.

[26] The study team gathered information to help inform impact study results, but did not include that explicit analysis in this report. This analysis will be included in the evaluation's impact study report.

B. Implementation study data sources and sample selection

To answer these questions, we used three data sources: (1) grant documents; (2) a grantee survey administered to all 2017, 2018, and 2019 grantees; (3) site visits to selected (2018 and 2019) grantees; and (3) Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS) data on participant characteristics and service receipt for 2018 and 2019 grantees.

1. Grant documents

Grant documents highlighted each site's plans for implementation as well as their self-reported progress, successes, and challenges. We collected and reviewed three types of program documents for the analysis:

- **Grant applications.** Grant applications identified planned partnerships, services, and staffing structures as well as information about the grantee organizations and community context. Our team used these documents to prepare for site visit data collection activities (discussed below) and to understand how grant plans changed over time.
- **Program materials.** During site visits (described below), our team gathered documents such as recruitment materials or flyers, workshop syllabi, class schedules, program handbooks, and blank case management/service plan documents. These documents provided details on activities discussed in site visit interviews.
- **Quarterly narrative reports.** DOL required grantees to submit quarterly narrative reports (QNRs) with information on progress, successes, and challenges. Given that the data provided in the QNRs is not systematic across grantees, we used these reports as a source of anecdotal evidence support key findings gleaned from other data sources.

2. Grantee survey

The grantee survey was designed to be a census of 2017, 2018, and 2019 RP grantees (N=116) and collect information on grantees' approaches to implementation. Data included in this report covers the 82 grantees (community-based organization grantees and intermediary grantees) included in the 2018 and 2019 survey cohorts. It provided (1) uniform information for all grantees about the organizational and administrative structure of their programs, program features, partnerships, and challenges and successes; (2) an understanding of variation across grantees within and across both years and target populations (adult and young adult); and (3) a context for understanding how grantees selected for site visits (as well as those included in the impact study) differed from grantees as a whole. Figure A.2 summarizes the topics covered in the grantee survey.

The 20-minute, web-survey was administered near the end of each grant cycle, over a period of about 3 months. This timing allowed grantees to provide a nearly all-inclusive account of their full implementation experience during the grant period, including challenges they encountered and the ways in which they overcame these challenges. Table A.1 shows the timing of each wave of the grantee survey as well as the response rates foreach round.

Figure A.2. Grantee survey topics

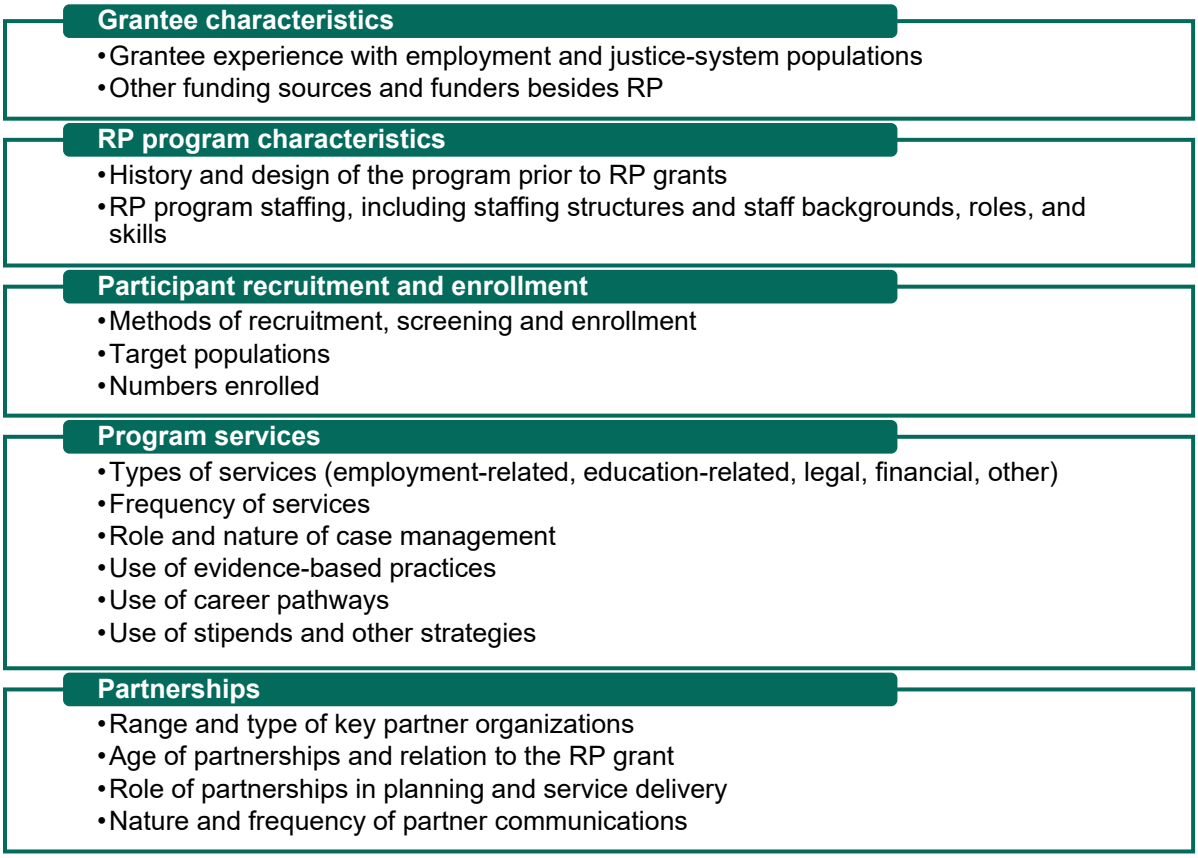


Table A.1. Timeframe for fielding the grantee survey

Grantees	Number of grantees	Grantee survey fielding	Response rate
2017 Grantees	32	February to May 2020	100%
2018 Grantees	40	February to May 2021	95%
2019 Grantees	42	February to May 2022	100%

3. Site visits

To gather in-depth information around RP program implementation, the study team conducted 27 site visits to a select group 2018 and 2019 grantees. Due to the timing of site visits, one of the 27 visits included an interview with only the grant manager so insights from that visit are more limited. The selection process was purposeful and considered a wide range of factors. While the evaluation team sought to include a diverse group of sites, it was not random and data collected were not fully representative of all sites as was the grantee survey. Selection criteria included the following:

- **2018 and 2019 sites that were planning to operate until at least March 2022.** The study team conducted site visits in early 2022. To ensure that sites were still operating at the time of the visits, we will only included 2018 and 2019 grantees with plans to operate through at least March 2022. This

ensured that sites had not begun to wind down program operations, limiting individuals with whom the study team could meet.

- **A blend of intermediary subgrantee and community-based organization (CBO) grantee sites.** To examine the uniformity of service delivery across intermediary subgrantee locations, the study team included 11 subgrantee locations, spread across four intermediary grantees previously identified in knowledge development activities as having both robust training services and uniform service delivery models across subgrantee sites.[27] The study team also interviewed representatives from these four intermediary organizations about the intermediary role. The remaining site visits were conducted with CBO grantees.
- **A balance of sites operating young adult and adult RP grant programs.** The goal was to balance the number of sites serving young adult target populations and those serving target populations of adults of all ages.
- **Sites representing geographic diversity.** The study team gave some consideration to including grantees that represent geographic diversity, including representation across U.S. DOL regions. The study team also included some of the intermediary subgrantees and CBO grantees that were likely be included in the impact study.
- **Sites known to have implemented practices of interest.** Based on conversations with DOL staff and review of grant applications, the study team also selected sites based on information that indicated they had implemented strategies of interest to DOL, such as offering apprenticeships or providing cognitive behavioral therapy.

The evaluation team initially identified 27 sites to visit, but early outreach and coordination revealed that six of these sites had substantial staffing issues or had completed their 2018 grants and were no longer operating, despite our initial understanding of their timeline. As a result, we replaced these sites with six new sites either by returning to our selection list or, in the case of some intermediaries by getting their recommendation for sites to visit. Table A.2 shows all 27 sites visited and information considered in the selection process.

Each site visit was conducted by two study team members. Given that COVID-19 pandemic conditions restricted travel and in-person access, the study team conducted these visits virtually, using Zoom or Webex. While the total visit was considered a 2-day visit, most visit interviews were spread out over a period of several days to about a week.

[27] The four intermediary agencies include: OIC of America, The Dannon Project, PathStone, and AMI Kids.

Table A.2. Virtual visit site characteristics

Site Name	Location	Grantee type	Impact study site	2018 population	2019 population
AMIKids: Panama City	Panama City, FL	Intermediary Subgrantee	Yes	n.a.	Young adults
AMIKids: Pensacola County	Pensacola County, FL	Intermediary Subgrantee	Yes	n.a.	Young adults
Anti-Recidivism Coalition	Los Angeles, CA	CBO	No	n.a.	Adults
Capital Area Workforce Development Board	Wake and Johnston Counties, NC	CBO	Yes	n.a.	Adults
Center for Community Alternatives	Syracuse, NY	CBO	No	n.a.	Young adults
Fathers & Families Support Center	St. Louis, MO	CBO	No	n.a.	Adults
Foundation for an Independent Tomorrow	Las Vegas and North Las Vegas, NV	CBO	No	Adults and Young adults	Adults
Gang Alternative Inc.	Miami and Fort Lauderdale, FL	CBO	Yes	Adults and Young adults	Adult and Young adults
Interseminarian Project Place, Inc.	Boston, MA	CBO	No	n.a.	Adults
It's My Community Initiative, Inc.	Oklahoma City, OK	CBO	No	n.a.	Young adults
Metro Community Ministries Inc	San Diego, CA	CBO	No	n.a.	Adults
Metropolitan Community Services, Inc.	Columbus and White Hall, OH	CBO	Yes	n.a.	Adults
Mohawk Valley Community College	Utica, NY	CBO	No	n.a.	Young adults
OICA: Harrisburg/Tri-County	Harrisburg	Intermediary Subgrantee	Yes	Adults	n.a.
OICA: Portland	Portland, OR	Intermediary Subgrantee	Yes	Adults	Young adults
OICA: Rocky Mount	Rocky Mount, NC	Intermediary Subgrantee	Yes	Adults	Young adults
OICA: Springfield	Springfield, Ohio	Intermediary Subgrantee	Yes	Adults	n.a.
PathStone: Buffalo	Buffalo, NY	Intermediary Subgrantee	Yes	Young Adults	n.a.

Site Name	Location	Grantee type	Impact study site	2018 population	2019 population
PathStone: Camden	Camden, NJ	Intermediary Subgrantee	Yes	Young Adults	n.a.
PathStone: Puerto Rico	Bayamon Jurisdiction, PR	Intermediary Subgrantee	Yes	Young Adults	Young adults
PathStone: Reading	Reading, PA	Intermediary Subgrantee	Yes	n.a.	Young adults
Playa Vista Job Opportunities and Business Services	Los Angeles, CA	CBO	No	Adults	Adults and Young adults
Safer Foundation	Chicago, Rock Island City, and East St. Louis, IL	CBO	No	n.a.	Adults
SE Works Inc.	Multnomah County, OR	CBO	Yes	n.a.	Young adult
SER-Jobs for Progress of the Texas Gulf Coast Inc.	Houston, TX	CBO	No	Adults and Young Adults	Adults and Young adults
The Dannon Project	Birmingham, AL	CBO/Intermediary Subgrantee	No	Adults and Young Adults	Adults and Young adults
Towards Employment	Cleveland and East Cleveland, OH	CBO	Yes	n.a.	Adults and Young adults

Source: 2018 and 2019 grant applications.

CBO = community-based organization; n.a. = not applicable .

Table A.3 shows the topics to be covered by each respondent type.

Table A.3. Site visit topic, by respondent type

Topics	Respondents					
	Program administrator	Key partner administrators	Intermediary administrators	Frontline staff	Employer/ industry partners	Participants
Service delivery and community context	X	X	X	X		X
Overview of the grant organization	X		X			
Intermediary information			X			
RP program management	X		X			
Partnerships	X	X	X	X	X	
Recruitment, eligibility, and enrollment	X	X		X		X
Case management and service planning	X	X		X		X
Training services	X	X		X	X	X
Employment services	X	X		X	X	X
Ancillary services, exit and follow-up	X	X		X	X	X
Alternative programs and services	X	X		X		X
Outcomes	X	X	X	X		X
Overall successes, challenges and lessons learned	X	X	X	X	X	X

Site visits included:

- **Semi-structured interviews with program and partner administrators as well as frontline staff.** These interviews covered implementation, successes and challenges related to recruitment, enrollment, service delivery, and partner coordination. They also helped to better explain the community context (including alternative services that participants could access). Respondents included RP program administrators, leadership from key partner organizations (such as the local American Job Center, probation and parole, community colleges or other training providers, and employers or industry associations), and frontline staff responsible for service delivery (at the organization or through community partners, as appropriate). Interviews ranged in length from 30 to 120 minutes depending on the respondent's role. Interviews were conducted with 154 program staff members and 66 partner staff members, across the 27 visited sites.
- **Semi-structured interviews with intermediary administrators.** For programs implemented as a subgrant to an intermediary, we conducted semi-structured interviews with intermediary-level administrators. These allowed us to collect information about how the intermediary manages DOL

requirements and reporting, oversees its subgrants, trains subgrantee staff, and monitors subgrantee adherence to its program model. Interviews were approximately 90 minutes each.

- **Semi-structured interviews with employer partners.** As part of the site visits, the study team tried to conduct one to two employer interviews per site. These interviews aimed to learn about local employer needs, their involvement in the RP program, their experiences working with and/or hiring RP participants, and whether the program was meeting their needs. Employer interviews were approximately 60 minutes each. Interviews were conducted 26 of the 27 sites with a total of 41 employer partners.
- **Interviews with participants.** These discussions provided an opportunity for participants to share their reasons for and path to enrolling, impressions of the program and extent to which it enabled them to prepare for employment as well as to share their plans for the future. Site visitors worked with program staff to purposefully select up to two interview participants per site who were ideally still enrolled in services at the time of the visit. Participants received a $20 incentive payment. Interviews lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes. Interviews were held with 37 participants.

Senior evaluation team members trained all site visitors on the data collection instruments to ensure they shared a common understanding of the key objectives and concepts and would adhere to the protocols. The training sessions covered topics including the study's purposes and research questions, data collection protocols and forms, procedures for scheduling visits and conducting on site activities, and developing interview notes and other documents after the visit. Since some data gathered were potentially sensitive in nature, the evaluation team also included language to assure respondents that their responses would be kept confidential, that their participation was voluntary, that they could decline to answer any question, and that we would use all responses for research purposes only. Furthermore, we assured them that no individual respondents would be identified.

4. Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS) data

The implementation study also drew on data from the WIPS, a national database that contains data on participants in workforce programs funded by DOL, including the RP grants. The WIPS data contain individual-level demographic characteristics—including age, gender, race, ethnicity, disability status, education, employment status at program enrollment, and English learner status—as well as data on employment and training services received. These data were collected uniformly by grantees for RP participants and submitted to the WIPS.[28] (DOL also has a validation procedure to confirm the validity of data elements[29]). We obtained WIPS data from PY2018Q1 through PY2021Q2 or July 1, 2018 to December 31, 2021. The analysis conducted for this report includes participants enrolled at sites awarded 2018 or 2019 grants. The sample size includes 9,194 participants from the 2018 grants and 8,167 participants from the 2019 grants.

[28] The full list of data elements included in the WIPS is available at https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/Performance/pdfs/ETA_9172_DOL_PIRL_1.18.18.pdf.
[29] Information on the validation procedure is available at https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/performance/wips.

C. Analysis

To answer the implementation study research questions, the study team analyzed each data source as discussed below.

1. Analysis of site visit data and QNRs

We created a standardized write-up template to compile data in a systematic format across all grantees and all respondents as well as relevant QPR data. Site visit teams used the template to organize their detailed notes around key themes and topics addressed by each respondent and which mirrored the heading structure of the individual protocols. Each site visit write-up presented a coherent picture of how each grantee or subgrantee site operated, what services it provided to participants, and the varying administrative and organizational structures, partnerships, and linkages that they established as well as how those elements changed over time. These write-ups included both descriptive aspects as well as evaluative ones, identifying trends across interviews and highlighting challenges and lessons learned, identified and addressed by multiple parties.

We then systematically coded the writeups. The first step was to autocode all write-up material by the headings within the write-ups. The second step was then to code across material in the write-ups to a codebook structure that was aligned with the key research questions and which was linked to the report outline. This second coding step was manual and involved teams of coders, each responsible for coding material to discrete sections of the report outline structure. They coded to these pre-designed to codebook based headings while also identifying new, unanticipated themes within the data. All coding team members engaged in training about the initial autocoded structure of the data and then the more specific codebook based sections they would manually code to. The team used NVivo qualitative analysis software to complete this task.

2. Analysis of grantee survey data

The grantee survey provided contextual information about each program, services offered, and any unique approaches used, or populations served and how those components might relate to positive participant outcomes. We analyzed these data using simple descriptive measures (means, minimum, maximum, median, percentages) to generate aggregated counts of responses. We also developed frequencies by major subgroups of grantees, including intermediary versus CBOs, year of grant award, and target population (adult vs. young adult).

3. Analysis of WIPS data

When analyzing the WIPS data, we generated basic statistics (mean, median, percentages) to describe the characteristics of participants and the services they receive as part of RP grants. We reviewed these data at the grantee level and across all grantees to extract information, patterns, and themes.

D. Limitations and approaches to mitigating challenges

It is important to recognize the limitations associated with the implementation study. Although the study drew on multiple data sources, thereby allowing us to triangulate across them, it was not possible to document every aspect of program implementation.

- **Data from site visits should not be generalized across RP grants.** We were unable to conduct site visits to all RP grantees. As a result, the sample was purposefully selected. While we sought to include a diverse group of sites, it was not random and data collected were not representative of all grants. Within a given site, participants selected for the interviews were also purposefully selected by grantees using a convenience sample. Therefore, the data collected from these activities was not generalizable to individual grants.
- **Interview data may be incomplete.** The site visit protocols were designed to collect as much information as possible in the time available for each activity. During interviews, our team focused on soliciting candid responses related to the most important implementation topics as identified by the research questions. This approach relied upon respondents' willingness to truthfully report on potentially sensitive topics. The virtual approach to data collection (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) could have further limit respondents' openness because virtual visits may have limited interviewers ability to establish rapport with respondents. Regardless of how interviews were conducted, respondents might not have felt comfortable being completely candid about the breadth or depth of the challenges they experienced because they may have wanted to avoid casting their grants in a negative light. We framed our data collection activities to respondents as opportunities to share their lessons learned, instead of as auditing or monitoring exercises, and we used caution in the specificity of our descriptions and attributions in project deliverables.
- **The grantee survey provided only broad information.** The grantee survey, administered to all 2017 to 2019 grantees, served as an opportunity to collect structured information about RP services. To minimize burden on respondents, the survey was designed to take 20 minutes to complete and included questions focused on topics relevant to all grantees. RP grantees implemented varied service delivery models, so survey questions needed to be broad enough to apply to all grantees, limiting the amount of targeted information we were able to collect. Data collected through the virtual visits provided additional context for grantee survey responses.
- **Analysis of implementation data requires subjective interpretation.** Analyzing responses to questions about implementation experiences required some subjective interpretation. To improve our ability to identify barriers and facilitators, we used multiple sources of data for information about the grantees, allowing us to triangulate across respondents and data sources. Our primary informants were the grantees and program administrators, but frontline staff and the participants themselves offered their own perspectives. More perspectives came from the review of quarterly progress reports (QPRs) and QNRs submitted to DOL and other documentation provided by grantees. While we drew on insights provided by participants, these insights were anecdotal and not representative of or generalizable to the individual grantee or all RP grantees. Due to the nature of the virtual site visits, the interview teams were not able to document firsthand observations and interactions while on site. Additionally, given the timing of the virtual visits, data collected through these visits may not fully capture implementation of the grants as envisioned upon award. Rather, data collected through these visits could be biased toward implementation experiences shaped by the pandemic.

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