Authors: Gina Lewis and Jillian Stein

Portrait of the Reentry Project Grantees

For over a decade, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has invested in reentry services by committing substantial funding toward programs serving justice-involved young adults (ages 18–24) and adults (ages 25 and older) through its Reentry Employment Opportunity program (DOL n.d.). Between 2016 and 2019, DOL awarded nearly $300 million in Reentry Project (RP) grants to improve employment and

Study background

This issue brief is part of a study funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Chief Evaluation Office that explores the implementation and impact of the Reentry Project grants. DOL's Employment and Training Administration awarded a total of 116 grants in 2017, 2018, and 2019. These grants aimed to improve employment and criminal justice outcomes and reduce recidivism for individuals previously or currently involved in the criminal justice system.

RP grantee survey

A 20-minute web-based survey was a part of the implementation study. Mathematica administered surveys near the end of each grant cycle for RP grantees awarded grants in 2017, 2018, and 2019. Overall, the survey had a 98 percent response rate.

criminal justice outcomes (DOL n.d.). 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).[1]

Key findings from RP grantee survey

- All community-based organization (CBO) grantees provided education and training programs before receiving RP grant funding, for about 22 years on average. Ninety-nine percent of CBO grantees also previously provided services to people with justice involvement.

- Probation and parole officers were the largest source of participant referrals to RP programs.

- CBO grantees indicated they offered a wide variety of employment, education, legal, and supportive services, though the survey did not measure the share of participants who received each service.

- Responses to the RP grantee survey were generally consistent across grant years (2017, 2018, and 2019) and grant types (young adult and adult) with only a few differences in the types of services offered across grant years and grant types.

- The percentage of grantees serving young adults who reported challenges related to recruiting, engaging, and retaining participants in program services, and placing participants into jobs was significantly higher than that of the grantees serving adults.

- Almost all intermediary organizations reported having a strong influence on subgrantee program models, including the intake and screening processes subgrantees used.

This brief describes the 116 RP grantees funded in 2017, 2018, and 2019 and aims to address the research question, "What are the variations in the model, structure, partnerships, and services of the grants?"[2] To answer this question, descriptive statistics from survey data collected in all three grant years was used to summarize and highlight findings about RP program structures, partnerships, and services, in addition to chi-squared tests to determine whether any differences across grant years and grant types were statistically significant. The evaluation team surveyed community-based organizations (CBOs) that

provided services directly to participants and intermediary grantees that funded other organizations (subgrantees) to provide direct services.[3] Although subgrantees were not surveyed, intermediaries provided information on their behalf.[4] In the survey, CBOs responded to questions about their RP services, partners, and staff, while intermediary organizations answered questions about their subgrantees' budgets, program models, need for technical assistance, and challenges.

Types and amounts of RP grants awarded

Ninety-one grants were awarded to CBOs, and 25 grants were awarded to intermediary organizations. Exhibit 1 shows the distribution of RP grants provided to CBOs and intermediary organizations by grant year.

Across the 25 intermediary grantees, 119 subgrants were awarded to local organizations (subgrantees or affiliates) to implement the programs. Each intermediary had an average of five to six subgrantees.

Across the 116 CBO and intermediary grants awarded between 2017 and 2019, 55 percent were awarded to programs serving adults based on grantee applications and survey data. Exhibit 2 displays the percentage of grants awarded to grantees serving adults and young adults.

RP programs had experience providing employment-related services, and about 27 percent of organizations were awarded multiple RP grants between 2017 and 2019. In total, the 116 CBO and intermediary grants awarded between 2017 and 2019 went to 82 unique organizations. Of those, 15 received grants for both adult and young adult populations; 19 received funding for more than one grant year.

Grant awards for CBOs ranged from $560,000 to $1,500,000, and the average award amount was $1,424,159. Grant awards for intermediary organizations ranged from $3,996,685 to $4,500,000, with an average award amount of $4,462,217.

Exhibit 1. Distribution of Reentry Project grants, by year

Grantee	2017	2018	2019	Total
CBO	23	33	35	91
Intermediary	9	9	7	25
Total grantees	32	42	42	116

Source: Grant applications and grantee surveys.

Note: Intermediary grantees awarded funds to subgrantees to implement programs. The number of subgrantees was 44 in 2017, 39 in 2018, and 36 in 2019.

CBO = community-based organization.

Exhibit 2. Percentage of Reentry Project grants awarded to grantees serving adults and young adults

Source: Grant applications and grantee surveys.

Note: Eligible adult participants were ages 25 and older, and young adults were ages 18–24.

Finally, expected enrollment ranged from 70 to 705 participants, with an average enrollment expectation of 268 participants per grant.

Locations of RP programs

Programs predominately operated in urban or suburban areas (78 percent), with some operating in both urban and suburban settings and rural communities (21 percent), and only a small number operating primarily in rural settings (1 percent). The DOL funding opportunity announcement encouraged grantees to serve populations in high-poverty and high-crime communities, which may explain why a high percentage of programs operated in urban and suburban areas (DOL 2017, 2018, 2019). Exhibit 3 shows the number of grantees and subgrantees that operated in different locations throughout the U.S.
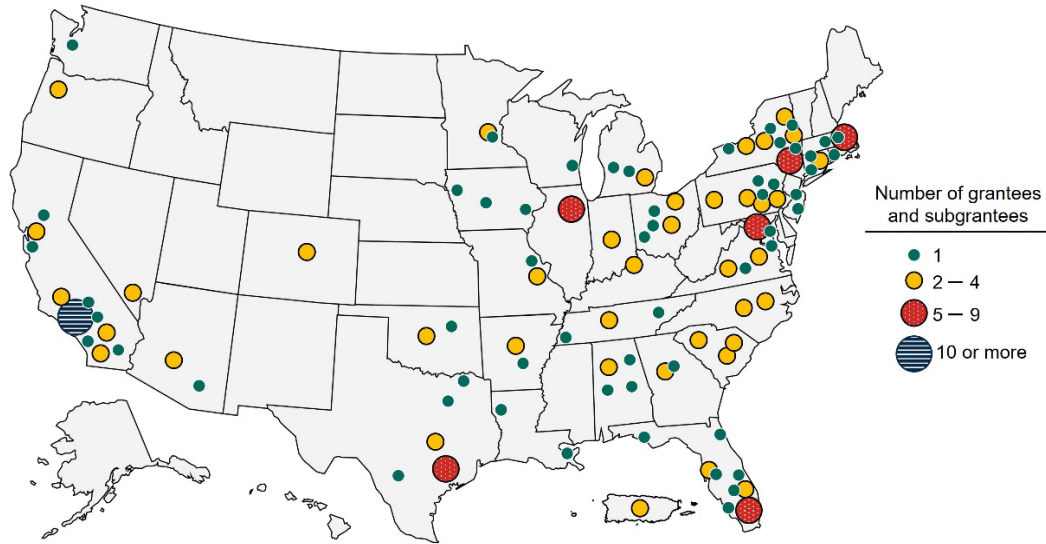
Exhibit 3. Locations of 2017, 2018, and 2019 Reentry Project grantees and subgrantees
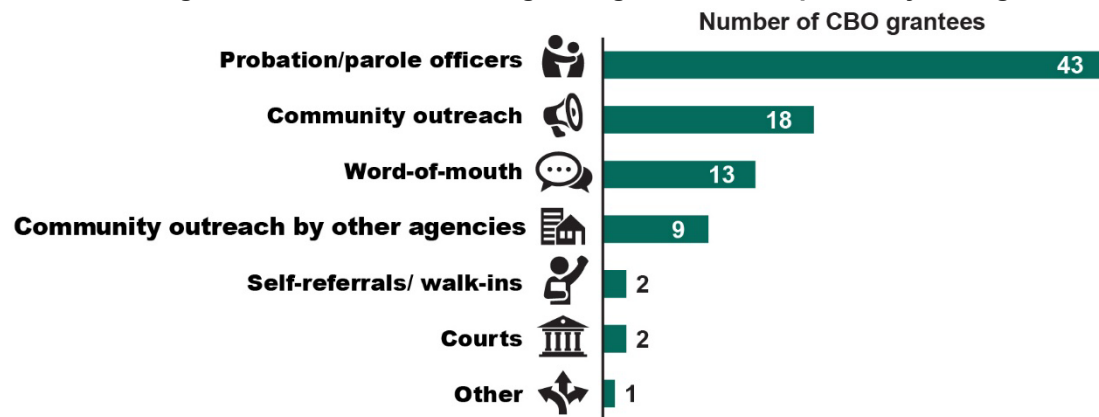

Source: Grantee applications and grantee surveys.

Overview of RP enrollment and services

Participants were reported to be introduced to RP programs through different referral sources. A family member, neighbor, parole officer, judge, or another community organization were potential sources that initially connected individuals to RP programs. The grantee survey asked about referral sources, and 93 percent of CBO grantees identified probation and parole officers as a referral source. Of the CBO grantees that used probation and parole officers as a referral source, 52% ranked them as their largest referral source. Other referral sources included community outreach, word-of-mouth referrals, and community outreach from other agencies. Exhibit 4 illustrates the number of CBO grantees that ranked each referral source as their largest.

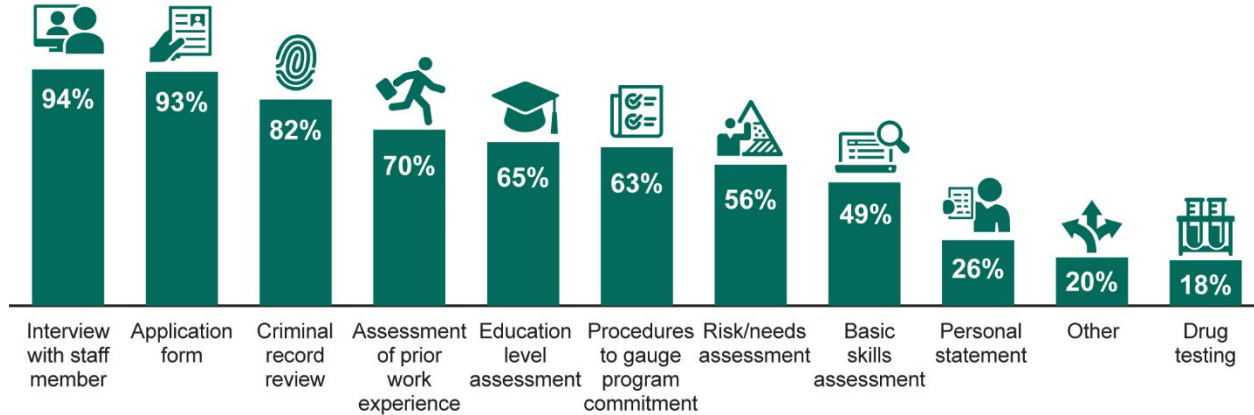**Exhibit 4. Largest referral sources among CBO grantees, as reported by CBO grantees**

Source: Responses from community-based organizations (CBOs) in the grantee survey (N = 88) from the 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?"

Once a participant expressed interest in the program, grantees performed different screening activities to gauge potential participants' suitability for the program and determine their eligibility to receive services. Eligible participants included adults or young adults previously or currently involved in the juvenile or

adult justice system or who had dropped out of high school (DOL 2018).[5] Participants had to meet DOL eligibility criteria and any additional criteria grantees chose to impose on participants.

All CBO grantees reported performing at least one screening activity to determine eligibility before enrolling a participant (Exhibit 5). The most common type of risk assessment was the Risk Needs Responsivity assessment, which 53 percent of CBO grantees used. CBOs reported using risk assessment models for both screening and service planning. Less than 50 percent of CBOs performed other screening activities such as a basic skills assessment, reviewing personal statements, drug testing, and other risk, violence, and relationship assessments (Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5. CBO grantees' screening activities, as reported by CBO grantees
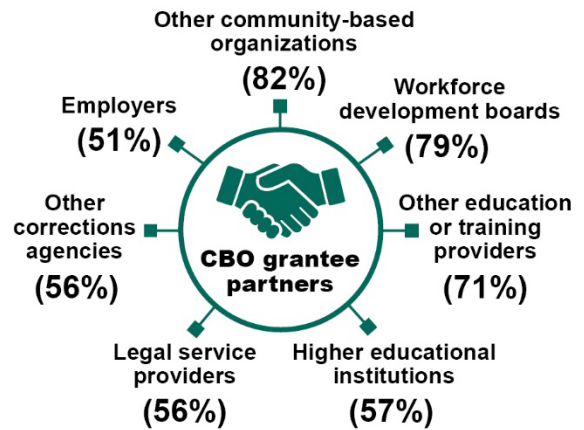

Source: Responses from community-based organizations (CBOs) in the grantee survey (N = 89) from the question asking, "Which of the following are part of your RP application screening process?"

Service offerings from CBO grantees

Grantees offered numerous employment, education, legal, supportive, and follow-up services to their participants. The grantee survey showed that the majority of RP programs operating under CBO grantees (64 percent) existed prior to receiving RP grant funding, making most CBO grantees familiar with service delivery. All CBO grantees reported having experience providing education or training programs, for 22 years on average, and engaging employers in sector strategies. Also, nearly all (99 percent) of CBO grantees previously provided services to people with justice involvement. Grantees were expected to provide employment, education, case management, legal, and follow-up services (DOL 2017, 2018, 2019). In the grantee survey, CBO grantees indicated the types of services they provided through their RP programs (Exhibit 7).

Exhibit 6. Forming partnerships to provide services

Source: Responses from community-based organizations (CBOs) in the grantee survey (N = 89) from the question asking "Does your organization have formal agreements, also known as partnerships, with any of the following partner types?"

Note: CBO grantees often established formal agreements when partnering with an organization or agency to provide services.

Exhibit 7. Types of Reentry Project services CBO grantees offered, as reported by CBO grantees

Share of CBO grantees	Type of Reentry Project service				
	Employment	Education	Legal	Supportive	Follow-up services
Above 90 percent	• Work readiness training • Career assessment or interest inventory • Occupational skills training • Courses that lead to an industry recognized credential • Resume writing workshops • Referral to programs at American Job Center		• Secured forms of identification	• Paid costs related to credential attainment, transportation, work clothes, uniforms, or other work-related equipment • Developed Individualized Career Plan (ICP) or Individualized Development Plan (IDP) • Provided health care services or referrals • Helped apply for public benefits	• Assisted with planning and carrying out next career steps and securing better- paying jobs • Case management
70–90 percent	• Preparation for a certification exam • Mock interviews • Apprenticeships†	• General Equivalency Degree (GED) preparation	• Expungement services†	• Provided incentives for reaching milestones, wages or stipends, and housing assistance • Individual or group mentoring • Financial literacy courses • Conflict resolution • Psychological counseling and substance abuse counseling or treatment	• Referrals to peer support groups
50–69 percent	• On-the-job training	• Assistance with financial aid planning • High school diploma program†	• Diversion services† • Created or modified child support orders† • Helped obtain protective and restraining orders†		
Below 50 percent	• Paid and unpaid internships • Group or individual job shadowing	• Preparation courses for college entrance exam†	• Helped parents obtain and retain custody of their children†	• Paid for or provided subsidized child care • Paid court fees or fines	

Source: Responses from community-based organizations (CBOs) in the grantee survey (N = 89) from the questions asking, "Which of the following services are offered as part of the RP program?" and "For each of the services you offer as part of your RP program, are these services offered by your organization, a partner, or both?"

Note: Items marked with a dagger (†) indicate services that were provided by a partner as reported by more than 50 percent of the grantees.

Although grantees offered many different services to participants, some services were more prevalent in certain grant years or among specific grant types. In 2017, significantly fewer CBO grantees (52 percent) referred participants to peer support groups after program exit than in 2018 (90 percent) and 2019 (83 percent).[6] Regarding variations in grant type, survey data across all three grant years showed that the percentage of CBO grantees serving young adults (66 percent) who reported offering diversion services was significantly higher than that of CBO grantees providing diversion services to adults (43 percent).[7] Conversely, a significantly larger share of CBO grantee programs serving adults (74 percent) helped participants create or modify child support orders compared to CBO grantee programs serving young adults (49 percent).[8] These were among the few statistically significant variations in types of services provided.

CBO grantees' program models for case management and employment services

Case management and employment services are fundamental services and essential to RP grantee programming (DOL 2017, 2018, 2019). Case management and employment services models aim to reduce or eliminate barriers and connect participants to employment (Lacoe and Betesh 2019). Only eight percent of CBO grantees reported not using a case management model, and 19 percent indicated they did not use any specific employment services model. Employment services models had to incorporate one of the following approaches: registered, industry-recognized, or pre-apprenticeship, work-based learning, or career pathways (DOL 2017, 2018, 2019). The employment models and the share of CBO grantees that reported using each model are listed in the text box at the bottom on the page. Case management services were expected to be delivered at the time of enrollment and continue throughout the duration of program participation (DOL 2017, 2018, 2019). Eighty percent of CBOs reported using more than one case management model. On average, CBOs reported using three different case management models. The most common were the following:

1. **Motivational interviewing.** Across all grant years, motivational interviewing was the most prevalent case management model. Seventy-four percent of CBO grantees used motivational interviewing with participants. This case management model uses a counseling approach to resolve resistance to change and motivate participants toward positive behavior change (Lacoe and Betesh 2019).

2. **Cognitive behavioral therapy and coaching.** Sixty-six percent of CBO grantees provided cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and coaching. CBT is an evidence-based approach for reducing recidivism that teaches participants to be mindful of and adapt their thinking away from harmful thoughts and behaviors (Lacoe and Betesh 2019). Thirty-eight percent of CBO grantees used the CBT model Thinking For a Change, which focuses on social skills, cognitive self-change, and problem solving (Lacoe and Betesh 2019).

3. **Trauma-informed care.** Fifty-six percent of CBO grantees indicated using trauma-informed care as a case management model. Trauma-informed care seeks to promote healing and prevent re-traumatization of vulnerable individuals (Bowen and Murshid 2016).

Types of employment services models

- **Sectoral employment and training (40 percent):** an approach that focuses on the needs and input of local employers in high-demand sectors (Holzer 2022)

- **Supported employment (39 percent):** an approach that helps people with mental illness and other disabilities obtain competitive work and provides the supports necessary to ensure their success in the workplace (Case Western Reserve University n.d.)

- **Employer-driven model for justice-involved individuals (36 percent):** an approach that focuses on the needs and expectations of specific employers when preparing individuals for employment (National Institute of Corrections n.d.)

- **Active career exploration model (24 percent):** a model to learn more about a career or industry by actively speaking with different industry professionals and creating a plan for working in a sector of interest based on the information gathered (Chen et al. 2015)

- **Transitions to success (20 percent):** a branded intervention that treats poverty as an environmentally based medical condition by creating a coordinated system of care across health care, human services, government, education, and faith-based organizations (Wilson 2020)

- **Alliance for career pathways framework (18 percent):** a framework for programs, employers, and other partners to connect progressive levels of education, training, supportive services, and credentials for specific occupations (Center for Law and Social Policy 2014)

- **READY4WORK (16 percent):** a branded intervention that provides soft skills training (such as resume writing), mentoring, job training, job placement, and case management (DOL 2008)

Source: Responses from community-based organizations (CBOs) in the grantee survey (N = 89) from the question asking "Which of the following employment models are used in your RP program?"

Subgrantees' program models and technical assistance received

In the grantee survey, intermediary organizations[9] reported on the program models of their subgrantees and the types of technical assistance provided to subgrantees. Ninety-six percent of intermediaries specified the program model their subgrantees were supposed to use along with the intake and screening processes (79 percent). All intermediaries also indicated that they provided different forms of technical assistance to subgrantees (Exhibit 8).

Exhibit 8. Technical assistance intermediaries provided to Reentry Project subgrantees, as reported by intermediaries

Share of intermediaries	Technical assistance activity
100 percent	• Implemented the program model • Worked with workforce partners • Recruited and enrolled participants • Generated and used reports for performance management
90–99 percent	• Hired and retained staff • Planned start-up activities • Worked with other types of partners • Retained participants • Conducted follow-up activities • Collected data and obtained data from partners
80–89 percent	• Worked with local juvenile or criminal justice system partners • Worked with education partners • Provided specific types of direct services
Below 80 percent	• Obtained additional funding to support the program

Characteristics of RP staff

RP program staff play a key role in achieving desirable outcomes (DOL 2017, 2018, 2019). As indicated in the grantee survey, on average, the typical staffing for RP grant programs included one program director, two case managers, one job coach or employment specialist, one vocational training instructor, and programs usually did not have educational instructors and mentoring coordinators.[10] As shown previously in Exhibit 7, over 50 percent of CBOs had partners provide educational services related to high school diplomas and college entrance exams, which may explain why 69 percent of CBO grantees did not report having an educational instructor on staff. Similarly, grantees were not required to provide mentoring services, which could explain why 64 percent of CBO grantees did not report having mentoring coordinators on staff. Other staff positions that CBO grantees specified as hiring for RP included data entry and management roles and legal services or legal support roles.

> **Desirable characteristics of RP staff**
>
> 1. 53 percent of CBO grantees ranked having **prior experience working with people with criminal justice involvement** among the top three desired characteristic for case managers.
>
> 2. 54 percent of CBO grantees ranked a **willingness to be a strong advocate** for participants among the top three desired characteristic for employment services staff.

The amount of time a staff member was dedicated solely to RP depended on their role. For example, CBOs with case management staff reported that 70 percent of staff in this role worked on RP full time. This differed for job coaches, employment specialists, and vocational training instructors; CBOs that had staff in these roles indicated that only 46 percent of job coaches or employment specialists and 17 percent of vocational training instructors worked on RP full time. These staff roles spent time working on RP and other projects.
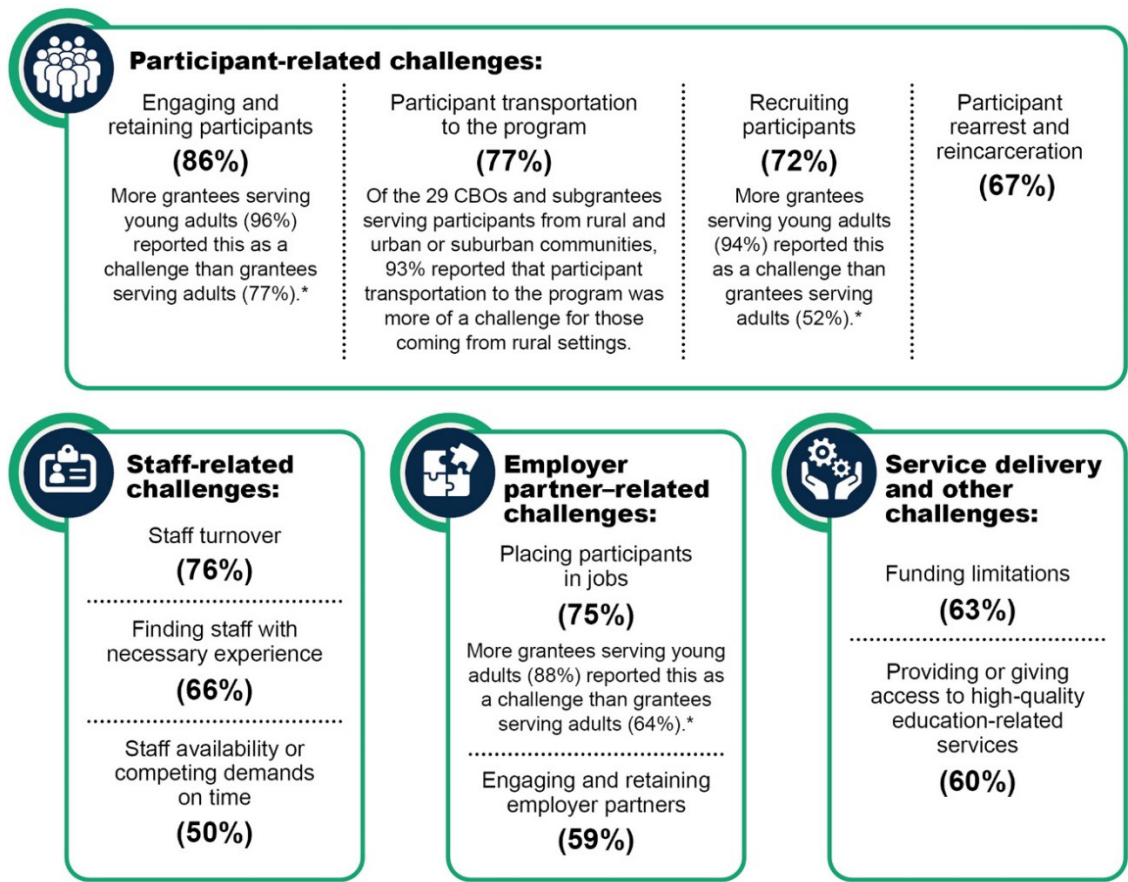
Grantee perceptions and challenges

Since receiving an RP grant, 90 percent or more of CBO grantees reported experiencing an increase in their capacity to serve justice-involved individuals, provide employment and training services, and build stronger relationships with their local criminal justice system and employers. Both CBO and intermediary organizations provided responses about RP challenges (Exhibit 9). Intermediaries answered survey questions about challenges on behalf of their subgrantees.

Exhibit 9. Reentry Project grantee challenges, as reported by grantees

Participant-related challenges:

Engaging and retaining participants (86%)	Participant transportation to the program (77%)	Recruiting participants (72%)	Participant rearrest and reincarceration (67%)
More grantees serving young adults (96%) reported this as a challenge than grantees serving adults (77%).*	Of the 29 CBOs and subgrantees serving participants from rural and urban or suburban communities, 93% reported that participant transportation to the program was more of a challenge for those coming from rural settings.	More grantees serving young adults (94%) reported this as a challenge than grantees serving adults (52%).*	

Staff-related challenges:

Staff turnover (76%)

Finding staff with necessary experience (66%)

Staff availability or competing demands on time (50%)

Employer partner–related challenges:

Placing participants in jobs (75%)

More grantees serving young adults (88%) reported this as a challenge than grantees serving adults (64%).*

Engaging and retaining employer partners (59%)

Service delivery and other challenges:

Funding limitations (63%)

Providing or giving access to high-quality education-related services (60%)

Source: Grantee surveys (N=113), grantees serving adults = 61, grantees serving young adults = 52

Note: Percentages represent the share of grantees that marked each challenge as either somewhat or very challenging in the grantee survey.

An asterisk (*) indicates the differences that were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.

CBO = community-based organization

Overall, larger shares of grantees reported experiencing more participant related challenges compared to other areas. The percentage of young adult grantees who reported recruiting, engaging, and retaining participants as a challenge was significantly higher than that of grantees serving adults.[11] Other grantee participant related challenges included transportation to the program and participant rearrest and reincarceration. Grantees also reported staff turnover, finding staff with necessary experience, staff availability, placing participants in jobs, engaging and retaining employers, providing access to high quality education-related services and limitations on funding to be challenging.

By describing and summarizing findings from three years of grantee surveys and performing chi-squared test to determine statistically significant variations in survey data, the evaluation team aimed to address variations in the model, structure, partnerships, and services of RP grants in this brief. All findings in this brief came from grantee survey data. Survey data was one source of information used in the RP implementation study. The RP implementation report further unpacks some of these findings and addresses other research questions by drawing on data from the Workforce Integrated Performance System and data collected during virtual site visits with the grantees.

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[1] RP grants awarded in 2017, had a 36-month performance period, nine month follow up period, and did not have an amount of time specified for the planning period in DOL's funding opportunity announcement. RP grants awarded in 2018 and 2019, had a 39-month period of performance, including a planning period of up to three months, 24-months of enrollment, and a 12-month follow-up period.

[2] This is one of four research questions the RP implementation study addresses. Additional research questions are discussed in the implementation report and other RP issue briefs.

[3] This brief uses specific terminology when discussing combinations of grantee types. We use the term "grantees" to refer to all CBOs and intermediary organizations that received grants from DOL in 2017, 2018, or 2019. We use the phrase "programs" to refer to all grantees providing direct services, including CBOs and subgrantee organizations.

[4] Of the 116 grantees invited to complete the survey, 114 completed the survey. Some grantees elected not to answer all questions in the survey. The percentages in this brief 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.

[5] According to DOL's 2018 funding opportunity announcement, only 10 percent of participants may have been enrolled as high school dropouts without being involved in the juvenile or adult justice system.

[6] $x^{2(1)} = 11.97, p = .00.$

[7] $x^{2(1)} = 4.21, p = .04.$

[8] $x^{2(1)} = 6.00, p = .01.$

[9] In this section of the brief, survey data for intermediaries draw on 24 intermediary responses out of 25.

[10] To determine the typical RP staffing, the evaluation team used the mode of responses to the survey question 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. Please consider only the staff who are considered RP program staff, including subcontractors, who have at least some time designated specifically for your RP program."

[11] Recruiting participants, $x^{2(1)} = 26.88, p = .00.$ Engaging and retaining participants, $x^{2(1)} = 15.87, p = .00$