SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Ready4Work Peer Review of Data Collection

Final Report
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Having high quality data is essential for ensuring that the operation of government funded workforce programs is properly understood and that performance accountability is fostered. In keeping with this, in April 2006 the Department of Labor (DOL) contracted with Social Policy Research Associates to conduct a peer review and data validation of the Ready4Work program's data collection system.

Launched in March 2003, Ready4Work is a national demonstration project managed by Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) that aims to reduce recidivism, and, thereby, redress the personal and societal costs that recidivism poses. It does so by providing program services that are believed to facilitate successful reentry, including job training and placement services, case management, and mentoring. Utilizing these program components, the Ready4Work adult program has thus far served over 4,100 participants in eleven sites.[1]

Our study was intended to document the reliability and validity of the data captured by Ready4Work grantees, and assess the extent to which these data accurately capture the services provided and outcomes obtained under this initiative. For this study, we conducted site visits to four Ready4Work sites selected randomly from among the eleven sites operating adult programs. During these visits, we conducted discussions with administrative staff, case managers, and those involved in data collection, storage, and reporting. Additionally, in each site we randomly selected twenty case files for review so that we could compare the information in these files with the data available in the electronic database managed by P/PV. We also conducted a search for other programs in the eleven sites that serve a similar population as Ready4Work, and sought to obtain publicly available data on offenders, to compare these outcomes with those achieved by Ready4Work participants. This report summarizes our findings in four key areas, including program background, data quality and verification, analysis of outcomes, and lessons learned.

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[1] These figures were accurate at the time the evaluation (through April 2006). As of August 2006 (the most recent point at which data were available), the program had enrolled more than 4,500 participants.

Program Background

Staff size for the four grantees we visited ranged from four to eight people. Case managers conduct the majority of data collection, relying primarily on their rapport with clients to obtain critical information. Two of the sites in our sample had experienced high levels of turnover, which led to some problems with data collection and quality. The range of services offered was substantial, with three programs providing nearly all services on site, and the remaining site referring its participants to most services.

In most cases, a single individual is responsible for all data entry; in two sites, this individual is the Project Director, while in a third it is the MIS Manager. Other staff collects the data but provide them to this single individual for data entry so that this individual has control over data quality and reporting. Sites uniformly had adequate infrastructure and computing capabilities to maintain and report data. Few staff had any formal training in database management prior to the Ready4Work program, though they participated in several telephone training sessions on the database developed for the project by P/PV staff and also received ongoing technical assistance for any database questions from P/PV.

Data Quality and Verification

Although the data in the case files was generally in agreement with the data in the electronic database maintained by P/PV, there were some significant inconsistencies, including most notably that there was little data in the case files concerning recidivism. This concern was alleviated, however, because P/PV staff had negotiated access to state files (in eight of the eleven states in which grantees were operating) to identify individuals who returned to prison as a result of a new offense. Thus, the lack of recidivism data in grantees' files did not compromise the ability to document recidivism outcomes for the program. Additionally, there was much less agreement among data that document services than there was in data documenting employment or demographic characteristics. In addition, one in eight of the files we selected to review (or 10 files in total) could not be located by the sites and, thus, could not be included in our review.

Our review of the data verification procedures found that, while most case files did have documentation to corroborate the data in the electronic database, almost universally these data were in the form of case notes, rather than any hard-copy documentation. For a majority of the data elements (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, services received), however, this is consistent with other programs and poses little concern about the accuracy of the information. For other data elements, such as employment, interested observers could be more confident in the accuracy of the information were there additional documentation, such as copies of pay stubs or employer verification letters.

Although many of the data storage and transmission procedures look similar across the grantees we visited, there are some important differences. For example, one grantee recently instituted monthly meetings of all individuals who collect data from clients in an effort to ensure that all relevant information could be included in the monthly update and other forms. These meetings have proven helpful in improving the quality and completeness of the data collection.

Analysis of Outcomes

Data on which the outcomes are based appear to be quite reliable. Further, although the employment measure is a somewhat limited one (that only documents whether an individual was employed at any point in a given month), the measures calculated are conceptually similar to those used for other employment and training programs. Most other employment and training programs do, however, alleviate some of the limitations of such employment measures by also calculating an earnings measure, but there is no similar measure used in the Ready4Work program.

For recidivism, P/PV employs a definition[2] that is commonly employed by other programs and studies that assess recidivism. As such, it certainly is consistent with prior work on recidivism rates. It should be noted that this is only one of several alternative definitions that have been used by other programs or prior studies, and requires a higher threshold for an individual to be counted as having recidivated than do some other definitions. Thus, the estimates for recidivism calculated by P/PV, while certainly consistent with other work on offenders, represent a somewhat lower estimate than may have been obtained using alternate recidivism measures that have been used in some prior research. This is not intended as a criticism of P/PV's efforts or the definition chosen, as both fit well within common industry standards.

We also examined the specific statistical and analytic methods employed by P/PV in their analysis of the factors that affect outcomes. In each case, these methods are technically sound and appropriate for discerning associations among the multiple characteristics of interest in the analysis.

We also sought to replicate the results that have been reported thus far by P/PV. In each case, we were able to replicate their figures, suggesting that the calculations had been completed properly and with sufficient documentation to allow replication by external reviewers. We also noted the comparisons P/PV used for the Ready4Work recidivism data, and presented some comparison data collected as part of this study. In each case, the Ready4Work program

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[2] For the Ready4Work program, an individual is considered to have recidivated if they return to prison as a result of a new offense.

compares favorably. These favorable comparisons must be considered speculative at best, as there is no readily identifiable comparison group that would allow for a precise estimate of the impacts of the program, because the characteristics of the groups and also the definitions of the outcomes differ.

Lessons Learned

We identified several promising practices in the program, as well as several challenges to the data collection and reporting efforts. One of the best practices observed in several of the sites was to have the project coordinator or other data manager serve as the single individual responsible for the management of the project's data, which helps to streamline the process and ensure accuracy in the data. Another exemplary practice is the use of monthly update meetings that are attended by all relevant staff. These meetings ensure that all active participants are discussed and that all relevant information known about them can be included in the monthly update. Another practice that has helped to ensure high quality data collection is to designate a single agency to provide as many of the supportive services as possible, though clearly this must be balanced against the need to provide a range of services to participants. Finally, the development and maintenance of the database itself was an extremely effective way of capturing a wide range of data, and P/PV has effectively provided training and assistance to grantees in its use.

Among the significant challenges, grantees that have had trouble retaining staff tend to have much poorer data quality, as turnover prevents staff from learning the most effective and efficient means of collecting and storing data. In addition, several grantees enrolled clients prior to their release; while this is allowable, many of these clients never participated in the program upon release, thereby producing relatively poor outcomes and poor-quality data. Grantees have also had trouble obtaining documentation for some clients, who do not have driver’s licenses or cannot find other legal documents. Grantees also noted that the training provided by P/PV would have been more effective (though also more costly) if done in person rather than over the phone. Similarly, grantees expressed a desire to have more interaction with their fellow grantees, to capitalize on the lessons that could be learned across the program. While this was mentioned often in connection with data collection and maintenance, some staff believed it would have been beneficial for learning about services and training opportunities being provided by other programs as well. Finally, although the data were found to be quite reliable, there was very little formal documentation of them. In the vast majority of cases, data were only supported by notes in the case file rather than by formal documentation, though this is only a potential concern for a few data elements, such as employment.

I. INTRODUCTION

Having high quality data is essential for ensuring that the operation of government funded workforce programs is properly understood and that performance accountability is fostered. Further, the need for high quality data is wholly congruent with the President's Management Agenda (Executive Office of the President, 2001) and constitutes a linchpin in the Office of Management and Budget's Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART), used to assess the effectiveness of federal programs. In keeping with this emphasis, in April 2006 the Department of Labor (DOL) contracted with Social Policy Research Associates to conduct a peer review and data validation of the Ready4Work program's data collection system. This effort was intended to document the reliability and validity of the data captured by Ready4Work grantees, and assess the extent to which these data accurately capture the services provided and outcomes obtained under this initiative. This report represents the culmination of our data validation work for the Ready4Work project.

In this chapter, we provide a brief overview of the Ready4Work initiative and the data collection system that is currently in place. Next we describe the process by which we collected data for this evaluation as well as the methods used to analyze these data. Thus, this chapter lays the foundation for the remainder of the report by detailing our approach to it. Subsequent chapters then detail the findings that emerged from the evaluation.

About Ready4Work

Approximately 630,000 persons were released from federal or state prisons in 2002, a number that has increased substantially over the past decade (Harrison and Karberg, 2004). These men and women are returning home having served longer prison terms and receiving less in-prison programming to prepare them for their return to society, to their communities, and to their families. They typically are poorly educated and lack viable employment options, stable housing, and the support networks to make a successful transition from prison to community (Travis, Solomon, and Waul, 2001). Furthermore, returning prisoners are increasingly returning to communities that are ill equipped to absorb them (Lynch and Sabol, 2001)—across the country, the neighborhoods that absorb high proportions of returning prisoners tend to be fragile at best, demonstrating high poverty, high unemployment rates, and high rates of single-parenting

(La Vigne and Kachnowski, 2003). Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that two-thirds of released prisoners are rearrested for a new offense—usually a felony or serious misdemeanor—within three years (Langan and Levin, 2002).

This cycle of imprisonment and reentry obviously has tremendous personal consequences for the men and women who churn in and out of the criminal justice system. But the costs are high as well for society at large, including not only the fiscal costs borne by federal and state governments that are associated with the apprehension and incarceration of criminals, but also costs associated with promoting public safety and attending to the service needs of distressed communities and the family members of those who are imprisoned.

Launched in March 2003, Ready4Work is a national demonstration project managed by Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) that aims to reduce recidivism, and, thereby, redress the personal and societal costs that recidivism poses. It does so by providing program services that are believed to facilitate successful reentry. These include:

- *Job training and placement services*. Accumulated research suggests that offenders who participate in employment and training programs are substantially less likely to recidivate than those who do not (Aos, Miller, and Drake, 2006; McKean and Ransford, 2004). Thus Ready4Work emphasizes job training and placement assistance.
- *Case management*. Apart from lacking job skills, offenders will often face a number of other obstacles to successful reentry, such as substance abuse or mental health issues, the lack of adequate housing, and unresolved personal or family problems. A skilled case manager can broker services that address these issues as well as more generally help offenders manage the reentry process.
- *Mentoring*. As noted above, offenders have increasingly been incarcerated for much longer periods than in the past, fraying their prior family and community ties. Yet research suggests that the strength of interpersonal ties is a critical factor in predicting recidivism (Petersilia, 2004). A key component of the Ready4Work model, then, is providing program participants with mentors from community or faith-based organizations.

Utilizing these program components, the Ready4Work adult program has thus far served about 4,100 participants in eleven sites.[1] These sites, along with their size and the nature of the grantee organization, are tabulated in Exhibit I-1.

[1] This figure is current through April 2006, the period for which we have data for the Ready4Work program. Ready4Work also operates a parallel program for juvenile offenders in seven sites, but this program is not being studied as part of this proposed project.

Exhibit I-1:
Ready4Work Grantees, by Type and Size

	Location (sorted by state)	Number of Participants	Type of Grantee
Union Rescue Mission	Los Angeles, CA	366	Faith-based
Allen Temple Housing and Economic Development Corp.	Oakland, CA	315	Faith-based
East of the River Clergy Police Community Partnership	Washington, D.C.	406	Faith-based
Operation New Hope	Jacksonville, FL	482	Faith-based
SAFER Foundation	Chicago, IL	370	Secular nonprofit
America Works Detroit	Detroit, MI	273	Secular for profit
Exodus Transitional Comm.	East Harlem, NY	290	Faith-based
Search for Common Ground	Philadelphia, PA	344	Secular nonprofit
City of Memphis	Memphis, TN	500	City
Wheeler Ave Baptist & InnerChange Freedom	Houston, TX	360	Faith-based w/ prison fellowship initiative
Holy Cathedral/Word of Hope	Milwaukee, WI	408	Faith-based

Note: Number of participants represents the cumulative number served as of April 2006.

As part of their grant responsibilities, grantees are expected to provide a monthly data report on each program participant. These reports include items collected at intake–such as referral and enrollment information, demographics, employment status, and criminal justice system involvement–and data collected as part of monthly updates–including the services received during the month and whether the person was employed or recidivated during the month. Beginning in January 2005, additional information about employment–including the start date of the employment, the number of hours worked, whether the participant is eligible for fringe benefits, and the industry of employment–was intended to be collected for each job held.[2]

These data elements provide a rich portrait of whom the program has served, what services program participants received, and what outcomes were achieved. However, the ability of the data collected by Ready4Work grantees to reliably document these activities is dependent on the data's accuracy. Thus, a critical component of the current evaluation was to conduct a peer review of the Ready4Work data collection system to examine its accuracy and reliability. To do this, we examined four primary dimensions of the data's adequacy, including:

[2] As we note in a subsequent chapters, however, these data are far less consistently recorded than those from the intake and monthly update sessions.

- The adequacy of the data elements being collected for answering DOL's broad research questions and for characterizing the characteristics, services, and outcomes of program participants.
- The adequacy of procedures that P/PV and Ready4Work grantees use in collecting these data elements, including how they ascertain whether someone is employed or recidivates and whether their procedures for measuring outcomes conform to generally accepted definitions and standards for data quality.
- Whether data reported to P/PV by grantees on program participants matches the supporting documentation in case files.
- Whether summary statistics computed by P/PV are appropriately calculated, particularly whether the measurement of outcomes conforms to generally accepted definitions and standards for data quality.

Furthermore, to the extent possible, we incorporated additional data collection into our investigation by including an analysis of available data to assess, in a preliminary way:

- Whether Ready4Work grantees are recording recidivism rates for their participants that compare favorably with those for reentering offenders in the communities in which the grantees are situated, and how their recidivism and employment outcomes compare to those achieved by other programs in these communities that serve ex-offenders.
- The adequacy of P/PV's analysis of which trends are in evidence regarding the types of program services that are associated with better success for program participants and whether we can supplement their analysis by providing suggestions on alternative analyses that may not have been conducted.

Methods Used in the Study

To accomplish these objectives, we engaged in a series of data collection efforts over the course of six months. We began by having a set of initial in-person and teleconference meetings, both with DOL and with P/PV, to ensure we had a clear understanding of DOL's expectations for the project and to obtain information from P/PV about the Ready4Work's data collection procedures and learn from them what aspects of the data collection procedures they were most concerned about.

After these initial meetings, we selected four sites to which we conducted visits to document their data collection, verification, storage, and transmission procedures. To select these sites, we used stratified random selection. In doing so, we first divided the eleven Ready4Work grantees into two mutually exclusive strata, those that are faith-based grantees and those that are not. Next, the grantees within each stratum were sorted by DOL region. Finally, we randomly selected two grantees within each stratum proportionate to the grantee's size (with size as

measured by the cumulative number of participants served, as was previously shown in Exhibit I-1).[3] Using this method, we ensured:

- By using stratified selection, that grantees of different types—specifically, those that are faith-based and non-faith-based—were each represented in the sample.
- By sorting the grantees by region within each stratum, that the final sample showed regional balance.
- By selecting within each stratum proportionate to size, that larger grantees had a proportionately greater chance of being selected than smaller grantees. The logic of selecting proportionate to size is that it improved the odds that we visited grantees that contribute more to the total pool of project data than smaller grantees, while still preserving the advantages of random sampling.

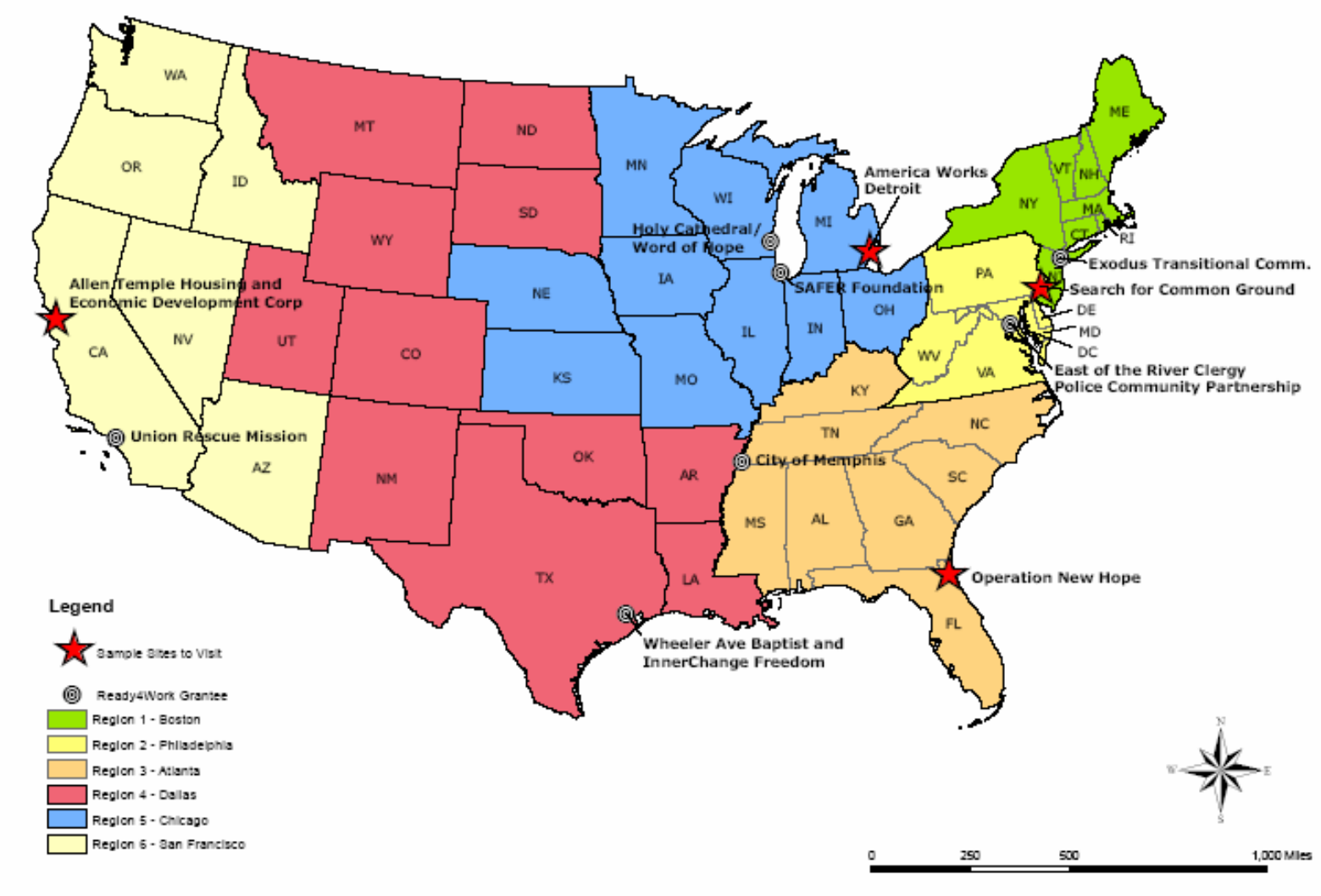
Using these procedures, the following four sites were selected:

- Allen Temple Housing and Economic Development Corp, Oakland, CA
- America Works, Detroit , MI
- Operation New Hope, Jacksonville, FL
- Search For Common Ground, Philadelphia, PA.

As the procedures virtually guaranteed, the selected sample displayed regional balance (Exhibit I-2 includes a map of the sites selected for site visits in relation to the other grantees) and included both faith-based and non-faith-based grantees.

[3] Faith-based organizations constitute about two-thirds of all grantees (7 or the 11 grantees, or 63.6%) and about the same percentage of all program participants (63.9%). Thus, by selecting two grantees from within each stratum, non-faith based grantees are slightly overrepresented relative to their actual proportional representation among grantees as a whole. However, this strategy ensures that we can generalize with approximately equal confidence to both subsets of grantees.

Exhibit I-2:
Ready4Work Grantees



Once this sample was finalized, the selected grantees were notified both by a letter from DOL and phone calls from P/PV that they had been selected for inclusion in the study, and all agreed to participate by hosting a site visit.

Site Reviews

We next contacted and scheduled visits of approximately 1 ½ days to each of the grantees. There were three key aspects to these site reviews:

- Conducting interviews with administrators and staff involved in data collection, input, retrieval, or analysis.
- Conducting case-file reviews of 20 participants at each site.
- Observing participant intake or monthly update sessions.

We describe each of these activities in turn.

Conducting Interviews. While on site we conducted interviews with a range of respondents, including:

- *Ready4Work Administrators* to understand the general context and background of the Ready4Work program, and its process of collecting, documenting, and reporting participant data and outcomes.
- *Intake Staff* to learn how information is elicited from participants and how it gets recorded.
- *Case Managers*, to understand how they work with participants to collect, document, and verify accurate information about services received and outcomes gained.
- *Data Entry Clerks/MIS Staff*, to learn about the procedures for storing, calculating and reporting outcome data.

The purpose of the interviews was to ensure that we understood what each staff member's role is in data collection and reporting and how they carry out their duties. Included in the topics explored were discussions of: background and contextual issues, information collection and documentation, data quality and verification, data storage and transmittal, and challenges and lessons learned.

Conducting Case-File Reviews. To examine the grantees' data collection and maintenance procedures, we conducted a formal data verification on a sample of 20 cases in each of the four Ready4Work grantees (for a total of 80 cases across the sample). These cases were selected randomly from among participants in two groups, those enrolled in the program at least six months but no more than one year prior to our visit, and those enrolled in the program more than one year prior to our visit. We selected cases in this manner to ensure that we had a good

balance between cases that were of older vintage and those that were more recent, when the grantee's data collection procedures might have been improved and polished through the benefit of its experience.

The objectives of the case-file reviews were to:

- Verify that data elements for individual participants as they appeared in the grantee's and P/PV's electronic analysis file correspond to information that is recorded in the participant's case file.
- Examine the extent to which individual data elements were appropriately documented.

We reviewed the following data elements as part of the case file reviews: (1) *demographic* information, (2) *services* that participants received, including employment services, mentoring and case management, and (3) *outcomes*, including those relating to employment and recidivism. Because the Ready4Work program began in early 2003, and there are many categories of services and outcomes for which data are collected every month, there were over 5,000 potential data fields that we could examine. In an effort to limit our review to a manageable number of fields, therefore, we further narrowed our focus to the following key elements:

- Demographics. Only a small number of demographic data elements was reviewed, including age, gender, and race/ethnicity.
- Services. We randomly selected *two months* for each individual from among the number of months in which that individual was listed as active, and reviewed all services the individual was listed as receiving during those two months. Additionally, to cover a broader scope, we validated whether the individual did or did not *ever participate* in each of three broad categories of activities: case management, mentoring, and employment services.
- Outcomes. Given the importance of validating outcomes for achieving this project's objectives, we validated employment and recidivism outcomes for *every* month in which the participant could have had a data entry.

To assist the site visitor in reviewing case files, we developed a Case-File Review Worksheet, which is shown in Attachment 1. Modeled after similar worksheets developed for ETA's broader Data Validation Study, the worksheet listed the participant's name and key information as compiled from electronic files provided to us by P/PV (e.g., the participant's demographic characteristics, services for the two randomly selected months), but concentrated especially on key outcomes (e.g., for each month, whether the individual was employed, and whether they were incarcerated). Further, the worksheet provides a series of codes for the site visitor to designate what source of documentation was in the case file to corroborate that item; these sources include the case manager's notes, a letter from a third party (e.g., employer, service provider), a pay stub, and so on. As a consequence of this exercise, then, we assembled a log for

all 80 cases we reviewed across the four sites of what sources of documentation were typically used, whether the documentation appeared to be adequate for purposes of lending credibility to the data elements that were reported, and the extent to which there were inconsistencies between the electronic submissions and the case files.

Observing Participant Intake or Monthly Update Sessions. For the information on the participant intake and monthly update forms to be compiled, intake workers, case managers, or other staff must elicit the necessary information from the participant. Thus, to identify how the data are actually recorded, we attempted to observe one or two of these sessions at each site. However, in many sites, discussions with staff revealed a concern that our observing these sessions might be viewed as an intrusion on the confidential exchange that participants undertake with their case managers. Given this, we only undertook this activity with the full consent of the participants and case managers. As a result, we were only able to observe two such sessions across the four sites. Nevertheless, these two observation sessions were quite helpful in determining that participants were very forthcoming in their information. Despite often not having documentation to verify their information, there was little reason to believe the participants were not being entirely truthful in their responses, as they willingly provided information that could have been viewed as sensitive or otherwise compromising.

Interviews with P/PV Staff, Document Reviews, and Program Data Files

Additionally, prior to beginning our site visits, we held several discussions with P/PV staff about a range of topics, including:

- What problems they have seen in the data submitted by grantees, including what data elements are most often incomplete or questionable.
- What instructions they have given the grantees about data collection procedures the grantees are expected to follow.
- What data checking or validation P/PV itself engages in.
- How P/PV plans on using the data it collects for analysis (e.g., what types of analysis it plans on conducting at the project's conclusion).

These discussions helped to focus our attention during the site reviews on areas that were believed to be of the greatest concern, and provided a solid foundation for our understanding of what grantees were told regarding their responsibilities for data collection.

Additionally, we obtained from P/PV copies of all extant data files as of the end of April 2006. These files have been used to support our own analysis (presented in subsequent chapters) and to draw the sample of cases for the case-file reviews (described above).

Collecting Comparable Data

In addition to the data collection described above, we also made efforts to collect information about:

- The employment and recidivism of ex-offenders served by other programs in these same Ready4Work communities during a comparable time period.
- The recidivism rates for these communities as a whole.

We found it exceedingly difficult to obtain information for the former, as little information is available about other potentially comparable programs. In only one site that we visited were staff able to provide us with the name of another program serving offenders in their area. In the remaining sites, staff were unaware of any other programs that served a similar population. Thus, these data are scant, and any comparison using them must be seen as highly speculative.

We did explore what recidivism data are available for the four communities at large. This exercise, too, was quite difficult, because recidivism rates are not routinely calculated in a comparable way for all states, let alone for smaller political jurisdictions. Thus, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) publication *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994* (Langan and Levin, 2002) is so often cited to this day because no comparable multi-state computation of recidivism has been calculated more recently. The results of our data collection and analysis in this area are presented in Chapter 4.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have provided an overview of the Ready4Work program, and of the methods we used in our peer review and data validation study of it. The subsequent chapters of this report present the results of our data collection and analysis. In the next chapter, we provide a brief overview of the four programs we visited for the study, including a description of the programs' organization and structure, the roles their staff play, and their infrastructure for data collection and maintenance. Chapter 3 provides an assessment of the overall data quality in these sites, including a discussion of data collection and documentation procedures, data quality and verification, and the procedures for storing and transmitting the data. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the outcomes obtained by Ready4Work participants, using the data provided to us by P/PV. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the lessons learned by the grantees visited, and the analysis conducted, for this study.

II. PROGRAM BACKGROUND

As part of our site visits, we held discussions with administrators and staff concerning the program background and organization. In this chapter, we provide a brief overview of these projects, organizing the discussion into three primary components: the overall organizational structure of the program (including the services each provides); staff roles and responsibilities; and the infrastructure for data collection and storage. We discuss each of these in turn in the subsequent sections.

Program Organizational Structure

The four sites we visited range in staff size from six to eight individuals. Typically, these staff include a Director or Project Coordinator, case managers, a placement specialist/job developer, a training specialist, and an MIS or administrative staff person. The relatively small size of the staff can be a benefit, as it has been in at least two of the sites we visited, because each employee has familiarity with the work of the others and, thus, can provide support and assistance to those other positions in a very collegial environment, and problems of missing or incomplete data can be corrected quickly. In at least one site, however, the small size of staff seems to have been a detriment, as significant resentment has built up between the staff. According to two respondents, this resentment has led to significant turnover among staff, and has impeded the program's ability to serve its customers effectively.

Typically, the programs bring in partners to oversee and coordinate the mentoring component. In Jacksonville, the mentoring coordinator often works out of the program's offices, but is not formally on the payroll of the grantee.[1] In all four sites, any additional services are provided through partnerships or collaboration with other agencies. According to several of the respondents we spoke with, this structure enables them to provide access to an array of services without creating a cost-intensive overhead structure for the program itself. In some cases, these

[1] Although not formally on the payroll, the grantee has developed a subcontract with a local church and its pastor, who serves as the mentoring coordinator.

partners have a fee-for-service approach, such that if they provide a service they are reimbursed by the Ready4Work project. In other cases, their funding is independent and no funds are exchanged when they provide a service to a Ready4Work customer. Among the services provided this way are substance abuse and mental health counseling, clothing, transportation (though often the programs provide bus passes directly to customers), and housing assistance.

One of the key distinctions among the four sites we visited is the degree to which programs have experienced turnover among their staff, or even among the entire agencies responsible for operating the program. In two sites, the leadership and the majority of the staff have remained in place throughout the project, and these sites perhaps not coincidentally had the highest quality data during our reviews, as discussed in the next chapter. A third site has had the same leadership, but has seen wholesale turnover among the staff (in many cases, several staff in a single position have come and gone during the grant period). The final site visited has actually had three separate iterations of agencies operating the program. While the fiscal agent has remained constant, the original set of agencies providing program services stopped doing so when they were asked to convert to a performance-based contracting model. A replacement agency then operated the program for approximately six months, but discontinued its association because the agency's leaders did not feel they were being compensated sufficiently for their customers' outcomes. Finally, the fiscal agent itself took responsibility for providing program services directly. These disruptions are evident in the overall quality and availability of data for their customers, as is detailed in the next chapter.

The range of services offered by the four programs we visited was vast. In one case, the services directly offered include only a two-week course that included a blend of job readiness, basic skills, and life skills training. In another program, more than 20 services are provided directly, and more than 30 are offered through the program's partnerships. Thus, the programs and their content vary substantially.

In Philadelphia, more than 30 services are listed as available to Ready4Work customers, including mentoring, job services, health services, housing, childcare, occupational training, educational services, life skills services, and emergency cash/food/housing. Most of these services are not provided directly by the grantee, however, but by other agencies to which the grantee refers its clients. The grantee in this site (Search for Common Ground, SFCG) sees itself primarily as an access point to a network of social services available to participants.

SFCG does provide two main categories of services directly to participants. These are case management and job services, both of which incorporate a broad range of service. For example, case management includes assessing an individual's eligibility for the program, conducting

intake and assessing the client's needs, and providing assistance in finding housing for participants, enrolling them in school, helping them to get their drivers license, or assisting with their income taxes. Communication with clients, whether through personal contact, telephone calls, or email or regular mail, is also recorded as case management. Similarly, SFCG case managers record a number of the services they provide as employment services. These include assisting the client in completing job applications, creating, posting and faxing resumes, and writing cover letters. They also spend a considerable amount of time on the internet with the participant looking through job listings, and will call an employer on behalf of the client to find out if the employer hires ex-offenders. A few other services can be provided either directly or through a referral to another agency. For example, many of the services described above that are recorded as employment services can also be provided through referrals to CareerLink, Philadelphia's system of One-Stop centers.

In Oakland, a great many services were reported to be available and offered directly by the program, including a GED class offered both during the day and in the evening, pre-employment services (e.g. job coaching, job search assistance), a pre-apprenticeship class, and access to a "One-Stop" center that has a computer lab and an instructor to help clients navigate the web, set up email accounts, and prepare a resume. Clients also have access to a range of supportive services such as transportation support, housing or substance abuse referrals, and case advocacy (e.g. going to court to help clients get their kids returned to them from child protective services). The program also offers a mentoring component, but there have been significant challenges to effectively providing this service, both because they have had difficulty finding mentors who are willing to mentor offenders and because the clients themselves often do not show up for mentor meetings.

Of these services, however, the case managers report (and our on-site observation confirmed) that it has been difficult to get participants to attend classes or training because they are simply not interested in going to school, or participating in an environment that feels academic, instead preferring to find employment immediately. One case manager noted, "If they didn't get a GED from 2 years in jail, they're not going to get their GED here." Such sentiment was only found to be common among staff in this site.

In an attempt to meet client preferences, then, the program has modified its training services somewhat from its initial structure. For instance, the pre-apprenticeship class was originally designed as a 14-week program, but after receiving several complaints about this, and experiencing many dropouts that were due to the length of this class, staff quickly reduced the training to eleven weeks. Later, this was reduced even further such that now it lasts only four weeks. Even with this abbreviated schedule, though, the program has had trouble attracting

clients to attend the class. As a result, according to staff, the program has more recently shifted its approach away from providing training services and toward quick placement into employment. Now, when clients are assessed by their case manager as "job ready," they are not encouraged to enter training and instead are referred to the job developer for job placement. Staff feel this is the only way for the program to retain its clients.

America Works, the grantee in Detroit, offers a number of services to participants in-house. Of the 30 services listed on the monthly update form, 22 are provided in-house. Many of these services are provided by case managers and the project's job trainer. Employment services include job placement, soft skills training, and follow-up services. Case management and counseling services include individual counseling and group counseling, as well as court advocacy. In addition, a local church provides mentoring services for participants. Also, the program directly provides life skills training and emergency cash (primarily through bus or other transportation vouchers). All of these services are provided directly. In addition, America Works also directly provides a number of educational services, such as assessment, basic skills training, and secondary education preparation. Although a number of other educational services are offered through referrals, including GED preparation, secondary education, occupational training, and ESL classes, only GED preparation has thus far actually been provided to program clients. Additional services offered through referrals are marriage and family counseling, substance abuse services, mental health services, health-related services, child care, and community services.

The majority of the services America Works provides are delivered in the clients' first week in the program, because all clients are required to attend five days of training before they can begin receiving referrals to job opportunities from the program. Each day during this week focuses on a different topic, including skills and barrier assessments, basic life skills, job search techniques, expectations on the job, and retention and job performance.

This course structure is similar to that used in Jacksonville. Operation New Hope (ONH), the grantee in this site, provides a relatively narrow range of services directly, with the option to refer participants to other providers if they need additional services. Specifically, the project provides a two-week Career Development Class (CDC), which is primarily focused on job-readiness training, but also includes some basic skills and life skills training. Included in this training are discussions about how to talk about the clients' prior offense history in an interview, mock interviews, budgeting, and resumes. The course repeats topics every two weeks, so that it is open-entry, open-exit.

Prior to attending the CDC, participants spend approximately 1 to 2 hours with their case manager to enroll, completing the intake form and having a general discussion about their history, what areas they feel they need special work on, and what challenges they face to finding employment, including any substance abuse issues. Upon completion of the intake form, the participant is referred to a mentor coordinator, who is located on site. The mentor coordinator attempts to make a quick match and call the potential mentor while the participant is waiting. If this connection is made, the first meeting between the two is scheduled.

Once a participant has completed the intake form, s/he is immediately placed into the CDC, which they can complete in as little as two weeks, assuming they attend every day. Approximately two to three days prior to completing the CDC, participants are referred to the Placement Specialist, who works with them to identify areas of greatest employment interest (through the use of an interest inventory) and tries to make a match with an available employment opportunity. When a match has been made, the specialist will help them complete the application, if necessary, will make an appointment for an interview, and will drive the participant to the interview as well as any drug test required (and such a test is generally required).

Other direct services include providing bus passes to participants while they are in the CDC, and up until the time they obtain a job (the passes are no longer given once an individual has a job). All other services, including food stamp applications, basic reading skills, and clothing needs, are provided through referrals to other agencies in the Jacksonville area.

Staff Roles and Responsibilities

Staff tend to have clearly delineated roles in the program, and each is aware of her/his specific duties and responsibilities.

The project director has supervisory oversight over the entire program, and coordinates the roles of others. In two of the sites we visited, this individual also had significant involvement in the data entry. Further, because the project director oversees the entire program, s/he often plays the role of reviewer for data that is entered for an individual, checking the entries against their own knowledge of what customers have been active within the program and what activities they have engaged in. If there are discrepancies between what the project director in the two sites recalls from a given month and what the monthly update form reports, the issue is discussed until a consensus on the proper recording has been reached. In the remaining two sites, the project director remains largely separate from the data collection, instead leaving such activities to her/his staff.

Generally, across the four sites we visited, the case managers are the primary data collectors, as they oversee the intake process, and help to verify monthly updates. They work closely with participants to ensure that all the data has been recorded at intake, and maintain contact with customers at least monthly to determine whether the individuals are engaged in training or receiving other services, and to identify whether they are employed or have been rearrested or convicted of further crimes. Typically, these individuals have little formal training in data collection or maintenance, but are chiefly responsible only for ensuring that participants complete their intake forms and are contacted regularly. Their skills tend to be in developing rapport with customers, and communicating interest, care, and expectations to the customers.

The job trainer or training specialist documents the hours each participant spends in training – whether the training is job readiness, basic skills, or other forms. In some cases, this individual takes attendance for each session, and records the specific number of hours each customer spends in training. In other cases, this information is more generalized, in that customers who attend some portion of training are counted as receiving the full training. In Jacksonville, this information is confirmed with case managers, whose offices are located directly outside the training room (hence, they can also informally observe attendance of participants), but other programs do not rely on this backup mechanism for recording hours spent in training.

In two of the sites, the placement specialist/job developer documents whether an individual is working, in one case by collecting pay stubs and by conducting monthly job site visits and in the other by verifying this employment using the customer's self-attestation. In the remaining two sites, case managers fill this role as part of their overall data collection responsibilities. Similarly, in one site, the mentor coordinator is responsible for making the match between a participant and her/his mentor, and for overseeing the completion of the monthly mentor report forms. Other sites have a coordinator to oversee matching of mentors and mentees, but completion of the mentor report form is done by the case managers as part of their regularly monthly updates.

In three of the four sites, however, no matter who collects the data, a single person is responsible for entering it into the database for maintenance and transmission to P/PV. In one of these sites, the project director plays this role, while in two others there are dedicated MIS staff whose duty it is to input the data and ensure that it meets the requirements laid out for each field. These individuals are responsible for collecting the data from the intake form, the monthly update forms, and the mentoring forms and inputting them into the P/PV-designed data reporting system. When any data are missing, or the data that are reported do not seem to make sense, this individual tracks down the staff person responsible for collecting the information and asks for

clarification. This ensures at the very least that there is a check on data that do not fit what is expected to be reported.

As noted above, one of the primary variations across the four programs is the extent to which there was staff turnover, and this distinction often seemed to be associated with differences in the quality of data collection and management. For example, in one site, the entire staff had been replaced at least twice, because the agencies operating the program shifted two separate times.[2] Because of these transitions, there was little carryover from the knowledge and practices of the former staff to those who replaced them and, thus, the new staff had to recreate data collection and management practices from scratch.

In a second site, there had been no such agency turnover, but over the course of the project the entire staff (with the exception of the project director) had been replaced. Indeed, the longest any other staff person had remained with the project was eight months. This short tenure meant that staff were constantly learning their roles and responsibilities, including how to collect, verify, and manage data for their customers. When departing staff do not leave sufficient information behind, new staff have found that they cannot contact customers who have completed their training and are only receiving follow-up contacts. This means that these customers no longer are included in monthly updates and their employment and recidivism outcomes cannot be recorded. Further, records for some customers simply disappear during this turnover. Given this, there is no way in which the data that are included in the database for these customers can be verified. The extent of this problem is described in the subsequent chapter.

The remaining two sites have not experienced such substantial turnover. While all their staff have not remained in place throughout the life of the project, there has been much less turnover and, when it does occur, the transitions have been much smoother. In large part, this appears to be due to a concerted effort on the part of the project director or other staff to preserve the knowledge and prior practices and ease the learning curve of new staff. Further, the turnover in these projects largely occurred early on, and staff that currently are employed by the projects have been in their positions for at least a year and, in the majority of cases, for more than two years. This stability seems to be directly related to the overall quality of data collection and management, as well as the knowledge of the overall caseload and how to maintain and verify data that are collected.

[2] The grantee had not changed. However, the grantee had subcontracted actual service delivery out to other agencies, and two separate times the subcontractor opted to discontinue its participation.

Infrastructure to Support Data Collection/Management

Each of the sites operating the Ready4Work program has access to a data management and reporting system designed by P/PV. This system includes fields that correspond to the various forms used for the program, and allows an individual to enter data from the forms into the appropriate fields within the database. All of the sites in our sample had relatively recent-model computers on which the data system was stored. Indeed, in the three sites in which a single individual was responsible for inputting and maintaining the data, their computer had more than adequate processing capacity and speed. Staff at each of the four sites had high praise for the database and how easy it made their reporting requirements. Staff noted that the system had numerous checks so that erroneous or missing data would not be accepted. For example, the database will not allow further data entry unless one inputs a social security number and a valid release date;[3] without these, no further information can be recorded for these clients. Additionally, most fields in the database offer dropdown menus from which the person entering the data can simply select a valid option. This serves to make the job of entering data easier and quicker, and also ensures that only valid data options are entered. Such constraints offer a useful reminder to the data entry staff member of what the valid options are, thereby triggering their awareness of discrepancies at the moment of entry, rather than subsequent to it.

In two of the sites, staff maintained a separate database from the one designed by P/PV. In both cases, this was due to the fact that the grantee was operating programs under more than one grant and, thus, had more than one set of reporting requirements. Because of this, they may have collected more data for their Ready4Work customers than was actually required for their reporting to P/PV. Though they did not mention it, given that these two sites tended to have greater discrepancies between their case files and the data housed electronically, it is possible that these multiple systems caused some level of confusion among staff, making them less certain about which data were required for which customers. This confusion could have been exacerbated due to the turnover that occurred among the program staff.

Very few of the staff employed by any of the four programs we visited had any formal training in information technology or databases prior to their participation in the Ready4Work program, but all gave favorable reviews of the database and training provided by P/PV. Generally speaking, the person with the most experience with such systems was the individual responsible for entering and reporting data. This person's experience typically was gathered while working

[3] To be eligible for Ready4Work, an individual must enroll in the program anytime between 90 days prior or subsequent to their release date. Thus, the database has a built-in check to ensure that all enrolled clients are, in fact, eligible for the program by comparing their release and enrollment dates.

either for the Ready4Work grantee or in a prior job in which they were given responsibility for data entry and reporting. This experience was largely hands-on and very specific to the particular databases with which they had worked. In other words, these staff may have had experience with Microsoft Access databases, but were largely unfamiliar with other types of databases or other structures. Perhaps as a result of this focused experience, they relied on a relatively narrow range of potential solutions to problems that emerged. The primary solution was to request assistance from staff at P/PV.

Although all staff praised P/PV for their quick responsiveness to any questions grantees had, and for their initial training and subsequent trainings when any updates to the data reporting system were developed, at least two sites noted that there was still significant confusion early in the project among those responsible for collecting and managing the data. Indeed, most sites acknowledged that their staff had very little formal training in data collection, verification, and management prior to their involvement with the Ready4Work program, which led them to have difficulty with reporting early in the life of the grant (and which had implications for the availability and quality of the data files we reviewed, as described in the next chapter).

One site noted that the first training occurred well into the first year of program implementation, thereby making the first several months of project operations more difficult. This initial training, however, was viewed as quite helpful, and it included useful information on how to organize participant files, what documents to include for verifying eligibility for the program, the definitions of each item in the MIS (i.e., active, termination, etc.), and strategies for completing the various forms required by P/PV.

To date, there have been three updates to the monthly intake form. After each update, P/PV held a training session via conference call with all of the Ready4Work grantees. Although staff at two of the sites we visited felt these trainings were highly effective and thorough, staff in the other two sites were not fully satisfied with them. The primary complaint was that, because the structure of the training was a conference call with more than ten grantees, there simply wasn't sufficient opportunity to ask questions and get clarification on the updates being implemented or on reporting more generally. Despite these concerns, however, these staff acknowledged that the trainings did convey substantial information, including the justification for the changes being made, and that, short of a far more costly in-person session or individual sessions with each grantee, P/PV had done the best it could to impart the necessary information.

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III. DATA QUALITY AND VERIFICATION

In the previous chapter, we discussed the basic organizational structures of and services offered by the four Ready4Work grantees we visited, as well as the staff roles and the infrastructure in place for collecting, verifying, maintaining, and reporting data for their clients. Each of these topics was included as part of the discussions held while on-site. The primary focus of our site visits, however, was to examine the overall quality of the data being collected, the efforts made to verify these data, and the procedures by which the data are entered, stored, and reported to P/PV, which then uses this information to calculate grantee and overall program performance. These issues are the focus of this chapter. We begin by describing the procedures in place for collecting and documenting client data. Next, we provide an overview of the general data quality and the procedures used to verify these data, which relies heavily on our review and analysis of case files from each of the four sites. We conclude the chapter with a discussion of the procedures used for storing and transmitting the data to P/PV.

Data Collection/Documentation Procedures

As described in the previous chapter, the vast majority of the data are collected by case managers, either during the initial intake session, or during monthly updates. Although these individuals had little formal training in data verification or management information systems (MIS) prior to their involvement in Ready4Work, they are skilled in developing a strong rapport with their clients and, as a result, at eliciting the necessary information to document eligibility and other data elements required for the program. Similarly, monthly mentor and employment status updates may be collected by case managers, but in some of our sites were collected by the mentor coordinator and employment/placement specialist, respectively. These individuals, too, have fairly minimal experience in data collection or MIS, but have developed close relationships with clients through their work in matching them with mentors or employment opportunities. As a result, these staff feel that clients are open with them and provide accurate information that they can then record and report. Below, we describe the data collection and documentation procedures for each of the different types of data for the four sites in our sample.

Intake/Monthly Update Data

In each of the sites we visited, case managers are responsible for collecting the bulk of the intake information and much of the monthly update data. Although few documents or data sources are used when collecting client data—staff primarily rely on the self-attestations of the client—the case managers in each site do ask for social security cards and driver's licenses during the intake session.[1] In some sites, including Jacksonville, information on crime history and release date is obtained through a sheriff's department or other law enforcement report, which provides objective documentation for these data elements. Otherwise, nearly all the data collected during the intake session relies on the client's verbal assurances.

Case managers also are the primary data collection agents for the monthly update information. Generally, case managers try to maintain regular contact with their clients, though the frequency of these contacts varies across the four sites.[2] For example, in Detroit, the program has set a goal for their case managers to maintain weekly contact with their clients. Other programs do not target such frequent contact, but certainly encourage their staff to conduct regular check-ins, such as every two weeks. These regular check-ins are typically conducted by phone, which can pose substantial problems for case managers, since often they cannot locate the clients at their contact numbers. This problem was a particular concern for staff in Oakland, who reported having an especially difficult time contacting clients that have not been working. For these cases, the case managers do "collateral case management," which means that they corroborate the information about the clients from some other source (e.g. family member, probation officer, friend).

When they are able to contact clients, in most sites the case manager does not ask their clients each question on the monthly update form so as not to make the contact seem rote, but instead, obtains a summary of what is happening. Staff in at least three sites noted that this helps to foster a closer relationship with their clients, instead of encouraging clients to view the case managers as concerned only with getting "credit" for positive outcomes.

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[1] Although we present in the next section a description of the overall agreement between case files and electronic data, as well as the types of documentation used to verify the data, here it is important to note that a review of the case files suggests that these items are collected for only about two-thirds of the clients (though this percentage is substantially higher among clients enrolling within the last year, due to apparently greater emphasis placed on collecting them).

[2] An MOA developed between P/PV and the participating sites established minimum guidelines for contact with participants, including weekly contact for new participants with the minimum frequency then slowing to every two weeks and, finally, to once a month. All sites visited were in compliance with these minimums, and many exceeded them.

Once the case managers have collected the data, in most sites a single individual–either the project coordinator or MIS staff person–is charged with entering the data into the electronic database. During this process, if there are data that do not conform to allowable categories, or if there is a discrepancy, the project coordinator or MIS manager will address the issue directly with the case manager responsible for collecting the information. Once the issue is resolved, the data can be entered into the database. This practice was identified as a critical mechanism for ensuring that data are complete and accurate.

Overall, the data collected at intake is viewed as more complete simply because these sessions occur in person, while the client is engaged directly with the case manager. As a result, staff find it far easier to collect all the required information because they can rely on the client's self-attestation. Monthly update information is often less complete, because clients cannot be contacted or because the contacts are made over the phone rather than in person. Further, because some of the services a client might receive are provided through referral, case managers have less access to the information.

Mentoring

Procedures for data collection on the number of hours spent in mentoring vary across the sites. In three of the four sites, these data are collected by the client's individual mentor; to document this, mentors complete monthly forms documenting the amount of time they spend with their mentees. A week before the end of the month, the case managers receive these forms and record their data on the client's monthly update form. In Philadelphia, the case managers then check with the clients themselves to verify that the information between the two sources matches. When mentoring is conducted in a group or team setting, case managers themselves collect the information. For example, group mentoring involves activities where all mentors and mentees come together for a single event, such as going to the movies or a sports event. These services are documented by the case managers who also attend the event. Similarly, team mentoring involves mentors, mentees, and project staff meeting at the office to discuss issues and future activities. The team mentoring is also recorded by the client's case managers.

In contrast, in Jacksonville, the mentor coordinator is responsible for collecting data on the amount of time spent in mentoring, and providing this information to the case managers and MIS administrator. This individual therefore contacts each of the mentors, collects information from them on the amount of time they spent that month with their mentees, and calculates the information in summary form.

Employment and Training Services

In three of the sites we visited, data collected on the specific services received are primarily gathered by the trainer, because nearly all these services are provided directly by the grantee. In Jacksonville, the trainer records attendance and time spent daily in a hard-copy spreadsheet, which can then be incorporated into a client's file for monthly updates, and summed and then entered into the electronic database for transmission to P/PV. In Detroit, the process is similar, but the trainer generally waits until a client has completed an entire session before denoting it on the client's checklist, which is provided to case managers during the monthly update process. In both sites, a placement specialist records any activities that are conducted with clients, and these can then be entered into the MIS. Services provided to clients in Oakland are documented similarly, but staff there have had more trouble in collecting and storing this information. For instance, one case manager noted that she might not know if someone is still receiving services. To check whether someone is still enrolled in, for example, GED preparation, she checks in with the teacher or the sign-in sheet, but there is no formal mechanism for documenting this or the amount of time spent receiving these services. Thus, a formal process by which one can capture the number and types of services provided directly, as well as the amount of time spent in them, is an important component in accurately and completely documenting this information.

As noted in the previous chapter, the grantee in Philadelphia provides its clients with access to services primarily through referrals. In part because of this, staff in that site have experienced greater difficulty documenting which services have been received and in what quantity their clients have received them. Because the services are not directly provided, staff often do not know first-hand which services clients have received, nor for how many hours they received them. In this site, case managers will ask the client whether they received the service, the outcome of the service, and the amount of time the client received it.

Thus, one of the critical factors in determining the quality and completeness of data collection on services received is whether the service is provided directly by the grantee or is provided through referral to an outside agency. According to staff in all sites, services provided directly are much easier to document than are those provided by outside agencies, largely because of the methods by which these services are documented. Because case managers are the primary data collectors, it is easier for them to identify what services are being received in-house than it is to capture this information for services provided by others. Thus, the quality and completeness of the data collected is likely to be much higher for services provided directly. In fact, this is one reason that both Detroit and Jacksonville provide most of their services directly; as the program has evolved, these sites have moved toward working with fewer outside agencies so clients are easier to track and data on the services they receive are more readily collectible. Such narrowing of the

available service providers means that case managers can establish stronger working relationships with these providers and, thus, improve the likelihood of obtaining the necessary information.

Employment Status

The sites we visited each attempt to document whether an individual is employed in a given month or not, but they do so in substantially different ways. For example, in Jacksonville, this is documented each month through the use of on-site visits, contacts with employers and the clients, and by the use of pay stubs that identify the number of hours each employee worked in a given period. Client contacts document the number of hours the individual reports working in an average week.

In Detroit, project staff has developed an employment verification form. The form is completed monthly by the client's case manager. The form contains the employer's contact information as well as the client's job title, hours worked, salary, and salary after four months. Typically, the information is recorded through conversations with the client, though sometimes the data are collected directly from the employer. In addition, case managers make every effort to visit the job site between 30 and 45 days after an individual begins a job. Thus, as in Jacksonville, site visits to job sites are conducted, though this generally occurs only once in Detroit but monthly in Jacksonville.

Each of these methods – a staff member going on site or contacting employers and developing a standardized form that contains employer information – seem to yield solid documentation of employment, and lead to relatively consistent data collection. By encouraging contact with the employer, staff in these sites not only can obtain objective information about clients' outcomes, they also develop more solid relationships with the employers that may well benefit future clients looking for work.

In Philadelphia and Oakland, much of the data on a client's employment is collected by case managers, but there is little in the way of the standardized collection described above. Both sites ask for a copy of the first pay stub provided to employees, but rarely ask for this documentation after the first pay stub.[3] As the client continues employment, verification relies on the client

[3] Job retention incentives were provided by P/PV for those employed 60 and 90 days after placement. To receive the incentives, programs were required to submit to P/PV pay stubs documenting employment. We found very little evidence of the collection of these stubs in the case files, though it is certainly possible that they were no longer kept once an incentive had been paid.

providing the information verbally to the case managers. Case managers in these sites firmly believe their clients are always honest when discussing employment, either because they are enthusiastic to tell their case managers when they find employment or because they are eager to let their case manager know if they are no longer working because they want help in finding another job. While this may be the case, this mechanism for documenting employment outcomes is less objective than contacting or visiting the employer. As such, there is some possibility that, rather than obtaining truly objective information, instead staff members receive responses that their clients want them to hear. While we could not verify whether this occurred with any frequency, to the extent that pay stubs were not included in the case files the possibility does deserve some consideration.

Several of the programs also offered incentives to clients for maintaining employment for a set period. For example, the Detroit grantee offers clients two incentive payments of $100 each, the first for 60 days and the second for 90 days of continuous employment with an employer. Oakland offers incentive payments at the same time points, though its payments are $50 at each time. Philadelphia offers an incentive ($100) to clients who are employed six months after their initial placement. Jacksonville no longer offers its clients incentive payments, but during the first two years of the program, clients would receive $50 for remaining on a job for 90 days. Staff in this site said that, starting in the third year of the program, P/PV would no longer pay for such incentives so they are not currently being offered.[4] Staff in Detroit and Oakland report that these payments have helped to ensure that clients maintain contact with the program once they have obtained employment. These payments seem to be made, however, with little formal documentation of actual employment, as we could find no evidence within the case files that supported the payments. Thus, at least anecdotally, incentive payments are viewed as helpful in maintaining client contact, but we could find no evidence that employment was verified prior to payments being made.

Recidivism

Collection of data for recidivism at the site level relies on self-attestation to an even greater degree. Generally speaking, prior to being terminated from the program, the only way an individual is counted as having recidivated is if they or their relatives/friends disclose to the case manager that they were incarcerated. While the case managers in all sites were confident that clients were honest with them, this method of data collection relies entirely on self-attestation or the attestation of one who knows the client.

[4] This assertion is not consistent with other sites or with P/PV's own policies, but at least three staff in the Jacksonville site firmly believed such incentives were not allowable in the third year.

Generally, the only further verification grantees conduct for recidivism occurs when a project cannot make contact with an individual for several months. As case managers are moving that client through inactive status (one month without contact), and toward termination (two months with no contact, though not all programs follow this strictly), they may then check with probation departments or county and state-level incarceration databases to determine if the individual is incarcerated. Thus, the only formal verification one might obtain for this occurs after months of having no contact and, often, at the point of termination from the program.

At the program level, however, P/PV collects information on recidivism for all participants who sign a consent form agreeing to participate in the research study.[5] This data collection involves matching individual identifiers for the participants against state-level databases for each of the states or localities that make their incarceration records publicly available.[6] Because this matching does not involve the grantees, their case notes or other records may not align with data on recidivism calculated by P/PV. Indeed, the matching conducted by P/PV is more uniform than that conducted by the grantees, in that all participants' identifiers are searched. Thus, the program-level data reported by P/PV is a more reliable and complete mechanism for understanding recidivism among Ready4Work participants.

One concern with this distinction is that the recidivism reported by individual sites relies on a different definition than that used as part of P/PV's calculations. Staff in two sites reported that the definition of recidivism they use in collecting information on recidivism is when a client is incarcerated no matter the reason. This means that a client who is rearrested and incarcerated, but never actually charged with a crime, much less convicted, is considered to have recidivated. Further, individuals who commit a parole violation that results in their incarceration are counted identically as those who commit a new crime. In contrast, P/PV's matching with incarceration records requires that an individual return to prison as a result of a new offense.

As noted in Chapter 1, there is little consensus nationally about what should be considered recidivism. The authority most frequently cited is the BJS study of Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994, which includes resentence to prison and return to prison with or without a new sentence as two of its four measures of recidivism. Thus, the grantees implementing the Ready4Work program and P/PV do define recidivism in ways that are consistent with these definitions. However, as noted, some grantees expressed concern that using the broader

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[5] Fewer than five percent of all participants have refused to sign the consent form.

[6] These data are obtained for sites in Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Jacksonville, Memphis, Milwaukee, New York, Philadelphia, and Texas.

definition (with or without a new sentence) might provide a higher estimate for recidivism than would definitions that require a subsequent conviction or sentence to prison. In contrast, the method for calculating recidivism used by P/PV may provide a lower estimate for recidivism by requiring that participants be in prison as a result of a new sentence. This is not intended as a criticism of the definition adopted for program use by P/PV, as it is clearly consistent with much prior research and offenders. Instead, we draw attention to the different definitions available for measuring recidivism only to provide a context for understanding the figures that are presented for the program.

Data Quality and Verification Procedures

Data Quality

To examine the overall data quality, we conducted case file reviews at each of the four sites in our sample. We provided each site with a randomly selected sample of twenty cases, ten of which had enrolled in the program more than a year prior to our visit, and the remaining ten of which had enrolled between six and twelve months prior to our site visit. The purpose of these reviews was to determine how frequently the data in the case files matched those found in the electronic database. Ideally, we would find that the data match in every case, since the electronic database is derived from the data contained in the case files.

As we described in Chapter 1, we examined several key data elements within each of the case files. Included in this review were three demographic factors (date of birth, sex, and race), the clients' enrollment date and release date (from prison or jail), indicators of whether they ever received specific services (including employment, training, OJT, job placement, case management, or mentoring), as well as whether they received a subset of these services in two months that we selected randomly (from among the months they had been listed as active in the program), and whether the client was employed or had recidivated during any month in which they had available data. For each of these items, we began by examining whether the data available in the case files agreed with that found in the electronic database.

In Table III-1, we display the percentage of items that agreed between the case files reviewed and the electronic data. The first column in this table displays the overall agreement across all four grantees and all of the files reviewed. The next four columns display a similar percentage, but broken down by the four grantees that we visited. The final two columns divide the case files into the two enrollment date cohorts – those who enrolled more than one year prior to our visit and those who enrolled between six and twelve months prior to our visit.

Table III-1: Agreement Between Case Files and Electronic Data

		Grantee				Recency	
Data Items	**Overall**	**Detroit**	**Jax**	**Oak**	**Phil**	**Old**	**New**
Demographics							
Date of birth	93.2	100.0	100.0	92.9	80.0	87.5	100.0
Race	91.9	100.0	100.0	100.0	70.0	90.0	94.1
Sex	94.6	100.0	100.0	100.0	80.0	90.0	100.0
Services							
Enrollment date	86.5	85.0	95.0	85.7	80.0	77.5	97.1
Release Date	86.5	100.0	100.0	78.6	65.0	87.5	85.3
Ever received case management	90.5	100.0	100.0	78.6	80.0	82.5	100.0
Ever received mentoring	81.1	80.0	80.0	85.7	80.0	72.5	91.2
Ever received employment services	83.8	100.0	100.0	42.9	80.0	75.0	94.1
Ever received training	71.6	100.0	90.0	0.0	75.0	60.0	85.3
Ever received OJT	71.6	100.0	90.0	0.0	75.0	60.0	85.3
Ever received job placement	74.3	100.0	80.0	28.6	75.0	65.0	85.3
Month 1 status[1]	86.7	100.0	100.0	0.0	60.0	86.7	86.7
Month 1 case management	81.1	100.0	95.0	71.4	55.0	75.0	88.2
Month 1 mentoring	83.8	95.0	100.0	92.9	50.0	73.2	93.5
Month 1 basic skills	87.8	100.0	100.0	100.0	55.0	82.5	93.5
Month 2 status	83.3	100.0	100.0	0.0	50.0	83.7	83.3
Month 2 case management	81.1	100.0	100.0	71.4	50.0	81.0	81.5
Month 2 mentoring	85.1	100.0	100.0	100.0	45.0	82.5	87.7
Month 2 basic skills	87.6	100.0	100.0	100.0	53.2	82.5	93.5
Outcomes							
Employment[2]	83.8	100.0	93.8	80.5	58.8	82.9	84.9
Recidivism[2]	51.3	74.5	25.0	72.3	61.2	51.6	50.9
Total	**81.4**	**95.4**	**93.3**	**66.4**	**61.8**	**73.6**	**88.9**

Note: For each data item, the data reflect the percentage of cases in which the case files contained information that was consistent with the electronic database. N=70

[1] Months 1 and 2 represent the two months selected randomly from among the months each client was active in the program. Thus, these months are not identical across clients, as their dates of active enrollment vary. The percentage match displayed in these rows represents the average across all clients, independent of which month was selected for each client.

[2] For employment and recidivism, the percentage match and non-match indicate the value averaged across each of the months examined.

As can be seen in the first column of Table III-1, most of the items found in the case files agreed substantially with what was contained in the electronic database. Indeed, overall, the agreement was slightly more than 80 percent across all the files. One important caveat to this generally high level of agreement is that, of the 80 cases selected, only 70 case files could be found. Staff in Philadelphia could not find four of the requested twenty files,[7] while staff in Oakland could not locate six of the requested twenty files. Although we had initially expected that some grantees might not be keeping hard-copy files, preferring instead to use the database as their case management system, each of the grantees we visited in fact opted to maintain hard-copy files. Thus, the use of the database is not the reason for these missing files. Instead, these files had been kept at one time, and simply could not be located upon our request. As a result, none of the data in them could be verified. Thus, as noted in Table III-1, the figures presented represent agreement from among the 87.5 percent of selected cases for which we could locate case files. Given that none of the data in the ten missing files could be verified, one could conclude that this represents a lack of verification that, if these cases were counted, obviously would reduce the overall level of agreement shown in Table III-1.

Table III-1 also reveals, however, that there is significant variation across the data items in terms of their agreement with the electronic database. For example, although the client's sex matched (not surprisingly) in nearly all (95 percent) of the cases, recidivism information matched in barely more than half the cases. The primary reason for this low level of agreement on the recidivism measure, as well as a significant factor reducing agreement for other data elements, is that, often, there was no indication whatsoever in the case files that specific data had been collected. Thus, no matter what was in the electronic database, the case file data would be inconsistent with it simply because there was no indication relating to these data elements in the case file. This is most problematic in the recidivism data, as noted by staff in three of the sites we visited. Specifically, unless an individual was actively reported as having recidivated, s/he is counted in the electronic database as not recidivating. We counted missing information as such so that, in cases in which there was no information in the case file, but the electronic file reported the client as not having recidivated, it is considered a non-match for the current analysis. As a result, the recidivism data element only agreed in only 51 percent of the cases.

Note that this method of coding matches therefore represents the lower bound on the actual agreement that exists between case file data and electronic data. This is because any information that cannot be found in the case file is automatically counted as a non-match with the electronic

[7] All four of these files had enrollment dates of more than one year prior to our visit, and these clients were not, in fact, served by the current provider but, rather, by one of the agencies previously operating the program. Staff attributed this turnover among agencies as the reason for the missing files.

data, even though we do not know what the actual data are. As a result, the values displayed in Table III-1 should be seen as the minimum level of agreement between the case file and electronic data, as certainly some of the missing information, if located, would match with what is found in the electronic database.

Between the two extremes, most data elements saw agreement in approximately 80 percent of the cases. A few data elements, most notably whether individuals received various forms of training, agreed somewhat less frequently (i.e., 72 percent for whether the client ever received training or OJT and 74 percent for whether they received job placement services). This perhaps is not surprising given the discussion above that services can be difficult to document, especially when they are provided through a referral rather than directly by the grantee. Most of the remaining service variables show agreement in approximately 80 to 85 percent of the cases reviewed. Though we could not distinguish between those services provided by referrals and those provided directly by the grantee, based on responses from staff members it seems reasonable to assume that many of the non-matching cases are the result of services provided through referrals. This represents a difficult trade-off for grantees; they may be better able to track services provided directly, but often cannot provide the wide range of services that would best meet the needs of their offender participants. Indeed, an important tenet of the Ready4Work program was to provide services through a variety of providers to effectively meet the needs of participants. Thus, the potential trade-off in data tracking and quality must be balanced against these broader needs to effectively serve participants.

This assumption is given support by comparing the results across the four grantees included in our case file reviews. These data are presented as the next four columns in Table III-1. As can be seen in this comparison, data quality generally was substantially higher in Detroit and Jacksonville, and lower in the remaining two sites. Case files in both Detroit and Jacksonville agreed with the available electronic data more than 90 percent of the time, as compared to only 60 percent to 66 percent of the time in Oakland and Philadelphia. Thus, data quality was higher for the two grantees that provide more of their services directly. Further, these two programs also have benefited from greater stability among staff and strong leadership that believes firmly in the importance of documenting the efforts of the program. Additionally, staff in Jacksonville, especially, have adopted at least two key changes in the way they document their clients' data that may have led to improvements in overall data quality. As described in the previous chapter, staff in Jacksonville now meet as part of the monthly update process so they can discuss each active case and include all available information in the update. Additionally, each case file now includes a cover sheet checklist that is divided into the six primary sections, so that staff can easily identify without even opening the file if there is information that remains to be collected.

Efforts such as these likely ensure that data quality is high, especially as compared to data collection in sites without such safeguards.

The final two columns in Table III-1 display results for the two cohorts in our case file review. The column labeled "Old" refers to those clients who enrolled in the Ready4Work program more than one year prior to our site visit. The final column (labeled "New") refers to clients whose enrollment dates were between six and twelve months prior to our visit. We originally divided the sample in this way because we believed it likely that data quality would improve over time, as grantees learned more about how to collect and verify client information. As can be seen in Table III-1, it appears this assumption was correct, as data for clients whose enrollment dates were more than a year prior to our visit were of generally lower quality than that for more recently enrolled clients. Overall, data in files for clients enrolled earlier agreed with the electronic data in 74% of the cases, compared to 89% agreement in more recent cases. This likely reflects a general learning curve among all grantees (and the fact that some grantees have recently implemented policies designed to improve data quality, as described above). Whatever the reasons, however, it is clear that data quality is substantially better among the more recent cohort than it is for the earlier cohort, as nearly every data item shows a significant increase in agreement with the electronic data.

Data Verification

As described above, the verification of data collected for the Ready4Work program varies across programs and across the data elements at issue. In many cases, data are collected through client self-attestation and there is no other form of documentation included in the case files, but the four sites we visited did vary somewhat in the degree to which they attempted to verify the data in their files.

For example, in Oakland, the grantee mentioned that they devote much effort to verifying employment and less so to verifying recidivism. The data verification process for both items is done by the retention specialist, who attempts to contact everyone that is "active" to get an update on their employment status. In addition to the retention specialist conducting employment verification with the client, the job developer is responsible for verifying employment with check stubs or a letter from the employer. As will be seen below, however, this process has been a significant challenge.

In Detroit, most of the verification occurs through the communication between case managers and clients. During the intake process, a number of documents, including a picture identification, proof of residency, prison release papers and identification card, and a social security card, are required. However, it is not uncommon for the client to be missing one or

more of these documents; in such cases, the case manager will assist the client as much as she can to obtain it. For clients who are from out of state, this can be especially time consuming. Despite these challenges, in nearly every case there was a copy of a photo of the client, as well as photocopies of their social security card, release papers, and proof of residency.

For employment, clients are required to bring into the office a copy of their first pay-stub, though there is only infrequently a copy of this stub in the case files. Case managers also complete a monthly employment verification form for clients, which relies upon conversations between the case managers and clients. In addition, between a client's 30th and 45th day on the job, the case manager will conduct a site visit to their employers.

Recidivism is verified through an on-line information system, called OTIS, which displays information on convicted felons who are, or were, under the authority of the Michigan Department of Corrections. The system can be used by case managers to verify if a client has been arrested. As described above, however, typically, this database is checked only when a client has been unreachable for a period of months; otherwise, the case managers rely on clients to tell them if they have been arrested or incarcerated for any length of time.

In Philadelphia, the procedure of verifying a client's release date and whether they have recidivated is through the Philadelphia Office of Adult Probation. The grantee has a close relationship to this department, which will run checks on any of the clients in the project to determine if a client was re-arrested, what they were arrested for, and whether charges have been filed against them.

Case managers also reported asking for state identification cards, birth certificates, social security cards, and prison release papers. Despite this, however, there was little evidence in the case files that such documents had been secured. Otherwise, nearly all the information collected in Philadelphia relies on self-attestations by the client or on case notes.

Finally, in Jacksonville, although staff attempt to verify all data, generally this is done by checking with the client her/himself. Beyond client attestation, there are some checks on the data by staff, such as when case managers confirm the data on training services completed by the trainer. Otherwise, employment is verified by visiting the job site every one to two months, as well as by obtaining and photocopying pay stubs from the clients' workplaces. Additionally, recidivism is verified for those who are being terminated by checking county and state databases to determine if an individual is being detained in any of these facilities.

As a way of systematically documenting the data elements described in the section on data quality above, we identified what form of documentation was used in collecting or verifying it.

Among the alternatives that we identified were case notes (i.e., the case file simply contains a note indicating the information), self-attestation (i.e., the client verbally confirms the information), verbal confirmation (i.e., the information was verbally confirmed with an independent source, such as an employer or relative), and hard-copy documentation (i.e., driver's license, pay stub, release sheet from prison).[8] Table III-2 displays the results from our review of this information.

Table III-2: Sources Used to Verify Data

Data Items	Case Notes %	Self-Attest %	Verbal Confirm %	Hard Copy Document %
Demographics				
Date of Birth	2.9	13.3	0.0	83.9
Race	16.0	30.1	0.0	53.9
Sex	3.2	29.6	0.0	67.3
Services				
Enrollment date	71.6	28.4	0.0	0.0
Release Data	26.8	28.2	0.0	45.0
Ever Case management	99.7	0.0	0.3	0.0
Ever Received Mentoring	86.4	0.0	1.4	12.2
Ever Received Employ Svcs.	95.6	0.0	0.0	4.5
Ever Received Training	96.7	0.0	3.3	0.0
Ever Received OJT	99.7	0.3	0.0	0.0
Ever Received Job Place	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Month 1 Status	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Month 1 Case Management	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Month 1 Mentoring	94.2	0.0	0.0	5.8
Month 1 Basic Skills	97.1	2.9	0.0	0.0
Month 2 Status	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Month 2 Case Management	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Month 2 Mentoring	98.6	0.0	0.0	1.4
Month 2 Basic Skills	98.3	1.7	0.0	0.0
Outcomes				
Employment (12 months)	86.2	6.7	1.3	5.8
Recidivism (12 months)	98.6	1.4	0.0	0.0
Total	**79.6**	**7.2**	**0.2**	**13.0**

As can be seen in Table III-2, case notes were used as documentation in the vast majority of cases. For some of these items, such as sex or enrollment date, case notes certainly seem more

[8] A fifth option available to the case file reviewers was indicating that there was no documentation at all in the files. As noted above, this was a frequent problem, and was the primary cause of non-matching data, as shown in Table III-1.

than adequate for verification purposes. Similarly, many of the service variables also seem readily verifiable through case notes. Indeed, how else would one document an attempted or actual contact with a client short of noting it in the client's file? For other data elements, however, this method of verification could be troubling in that there is little firm evidence that the data are accurate. For example, in more than 86 percent of the cases, an individual's employment status in a given month was confirmed only by a case note in the file. In less than seven percent of the cases, this information included a self-attestation from the client, and in less than six percent of the cases was there any hard-copy documentation, such as a pay stub, that verified their employment. Though this does not mean the data are inaccurate, it is clear that there would be greater confidence in client and, consequently, program outcomes if there were stronger documentation of them.

Also, despite the fact that it was reported that recidivism was often documented by matching client identifiers with databases of those incarcerated, the case reviews reveal that nearly all recidivism data were documented in the case files using only case notes. While it is likely that these notes were the result of external checks of the databases, and that the case notes simply report those findings, we had no way of independently verifying this while on site. As a result, the data on recidivism that are in the case files are almost universally in the form of case notes.

Procedures for Storing and Transmitting Data

Once the data have been collected and, to the extent it occurs, verified, they are entered into the electronic database for storage and monthly transmission on to P/PV. As with the other procedures described in earlier sections of this report, these processes look much the same across the four sites we visited, though there are a few variations among them.

Generally, once collected using the hard-copy intake, monthly update, or other forms, the data are given to a single individual for data entry. In Philadelphia and Detroit, this individual is the project coordinator, who reviews all data for errors or discrepancies. Similarly, in Oakland, the program manager performs all data entry, and in Jacksonville the MIS manager performs this function. Particularly in the sites in which the project coordinator or program manager play this role, because they are familiar with all of the project clients and are in the office when clients come in to meet with case managers, they have some idea of the amount of service time a client receives, and use this knowledge when reviewing the monthly forms.

When data entry is completed, the data files are emailed to P/PV in a zip file. Approximately two weeks after this, P/PV replies with a memo, requesting either additional information or clarification from the site on its data. Typically, the primary deficiency is that there are missing

data. If a client is active in the program, but case managers were unable to contact them, there will likely be missing data for the month or months in which the client was not contacted.

As noted above, the primary variation on this general approach occurs in Jacksonville. In this site, to update the data monthly, all relevant staff members meet toward the end of the month to discuss each active case. Thus, both case managers, the placement specialist, the mentor coordinator, training specialist, and MIS manager meet monthly and review each case, with each person contributing what knowledge they have about the individual for that month. These monthly meetings, which were put in place approximately five months ago, have been critical in ensuring complete and thorough data collection, and, according to the MIS manager, have substantially reduced the number of data elements that she must follow up with on her own. Each staff person brings her/his own forms and notes to the meeting, and the monthly update form is completed while everyone is in the room. These forms are then provided to the MIS manager, who tallies up the individual hours for case management and other hours, such as training, job readiness, etc. Her tallies must match those computed by the individual staff that made the notes, or they will confer to resolve discrepancies. However, because this calculation is typically done electronically via Excel or Access, a discrepancy rarely occurs. Once the calculations have been carried out, the MIS manager enters the information contained in the monthly and other update forms. This can take substantial time, as they have approximately 125 active cases at any one time (with a high of 220 at one point). All data are stored in the Microsoft Access-based system designed by P/PV.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have described the data collection and documentation procedures used by the four sites in our sample. Additionally, we presented the results of our review of data quality and the procedures used to verify those data that are collected. These are based on our review of 70 case files selected randomly across the four sites. While we found that, in general, the data in the files was in agreement with the data in the electronic database maintained by P/PV in most cases, there were some significant inconsistencies, including most notably that there was little data in the case files concerning recidivism. Additionally, there was much less agreement among data that document services than there was in data documenting employment or demographic characteristics. In addition, one in eight of the files we selected to review (or 10 files in total) could not be located by the sites and, thus, could not be included in our review. Although these ten files were from only two of the sites in our sample, and nearly all were from the pool of clients whose enrollment date was at least one year prior to our visits, this does raise a concern about the degree to which data in the electronic database can be checked for their accuracy.

Our review of the data verification procedures found that, while most case files did have documentation to corroborate the data in the electronic database, almost universally these data were in the form of case notes, rather than any hard-copy documentation. For some data elements, such as sex, race, or enrollment date, this seems reasonable. For others, however, such as employment and recidivism, as well as the receipt of some services, having no further verification yields some questions about the overall accuracy of the data.

The final section of this chapter described the storage and transmission procedures used by the four grantees to input and send on to P/PV the data they collect. Although many of these procedures look similar across the grantees we visited, there are some important differences. For example, the Jacksonville grantee recently instituted monthly meetings of all individuals who collect data from clients in an effort to ensure that all relevant information could be included in the monthly update and other forms. These meetings have proven helpful in improving the quality and completeness of the data collection.

In the next chapter, we examine how the outcomes for the Ready4Work program are calculated, and compare some of these outcomes to those for other groups, including other offenders in the areas served by the grantees.

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IV. ANALYSIS OF OUTCOMES

The previous chapter identified the efforts grantees made to collect and verify data obtained from their clients and assessed the overall quality of those data, as a way to establish the reliability and validity of the data on which key outcomes from the program are based. In this chapter, we describe the methods used by P/PV to calculate these outcomes and the methods used to examine what factors influence these outcomes, and discuss any concerns that arise from these calculations. Following this, we provide an overview of program outcomes and compare them to those achieved by offenders who have not participated in the Ready4Work program.

Methods Used to Calculate Outcomes

We begin our effort to assess the methods used to calculate outcomes for the Ready4Work program by summarizing our findings on the reliability and validity of the data used in these calculations. For this discussion, we use reliability to indicate the degree to which the data that are available in the electronic database accurately reflect what data were collected by grantees, as measured by the level of consistency between these two sources of data. By validity, we mean the extent to which the data appear to be adequate representations of the concepts they measure. In other words, data for employment, as an example, are considered to be valid if they record employment in a manner consistent with prior research or other programs documenting this outcome.

Given the results from the previous chapter, it is clear that a substantial majority of the data in the electronic database is consistent with the data collected by each grantee, suggesting the former reliably captures the latter. Indeed, as noted in the previous chapter, most of the inconsistencies that occurred between grantees' case files and the electronic data were the result of missing data in the case files. Thus, the matching rates presented earlier represent a lower bound for the level of agreement between the case files and the electronic data, which only serves to improve our confidence that the electronic data accurately reflect the data collected by Ready4Work grantees.

The validity of the data, on the other hand, is less clear. Because there is very little documentation, other than case notes in the files, of how data were collected, we can be less certain that the electronic data are valid for calculating, for example, employment and recidivism

outcomes. In other words, despite the fact that the electronic data and the information in the case files agree, evidence is less compelling that these data accurately reflect the underlying reality of clients' outcomes, and, consequently, program outcomes. Of the two primary outcomes–employment and recidivism–only the employment calculation is subject to any concerns about validity, though it and the recidivism measure are both calculated in a manner consistent with other training programs or prior studies, as we discuss in the next sections.

Employment

In examining employment outcomes, P/PV uses three primary dependent measures: whether a participant was ever employed, retained employment, and for how long s/he searched before obtaining her/his first job. To examine the first of these–whether a participant was ever employed–P/PV's analysis is restricted to those participants who were active in the program for at least one month. Similarly, analyses involving employment retention–individuals who are employed for three consecutive months–is restricted to those who were active in the program for at least three months. The final measure–time to first job–includes all participants in the program (including those who do not find a job by their final month of program eligibility).

One concern about the employment measure for the Ready4Work program is that, because there is no threshold being used to document employment, it is unclear exactly what the term means for a Ready4Work client. Some clients are counted as being employed in a given month if they work only a few hours at a job that was acknowledged to be short-term only. On the other hand, many clients do secure full-time, permanent employment. Yet there is little way to distinguish between these clients under current data collection and reporting procedures. While this obviously affects how such data are interpreted, this limitation is not specific to the Ready4Work program. Indeed, most other employment and training programs currently use Unemployment Insurance (UI) earnings records to document employment in a similar manner.[1] In fact, a primary reason nearly all employment and training programs have moved to using UI earnings records is so that the measurement of employment is consistent across programs. Thus, despite the limitations of the employment measure used for the Ready4Work program, it is quite similar to that used for other training programs.[2]

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[1] Using UI earnings files simply identifies whether an individual received any earnings in a given quarter, but do not identify the number of hours or weeks worked to obtain these earnings. Further, the threshold for a participant to count as employed for the quarter is commonly $1. Given that the Ready4Work data are collected monthly rather than quarterly, one could argue that there is a higher threshold for documenting employment among its clients than for other employment and training programs.

[2] It should be noted, however, that other employment and training programs also report on clients' average earnings once an individual has exited the program, which in part overcomes the limitation of the employment measure because clients who are employed only part-time or temporarily would have lower earnings than those employed either full-time or permanently. The Ready4Work program does not report such a measure; as a result, the limitations inherent in the employment measure are more apparent.

P/PV has implemented a data reporting element on the job form that identifies whether an individual is employed full-time or part-time. Our examination of this data item, however, yielded very little correspondence between what was in the case files and what was in the electronic data. Further, these data were almost never verified by an independent source within the case files. Instead, an individual may attest that she was working full-time, but her/his paycheck stub might reflect only 25 hours worked during a two-week period. Such individuals routinely would be classified in the electronic data as having worked full-time. Given such discrepancies, it is simply difficult to determine what constitutes employment for a Ready4Work client. Further, little distinction is made in the official calculation of employment statistics between those who work full-time and those who work part-time. While either group can legitimately claim to have been employed, without a distinction drawn between them it is less clear what employment really means. As a result, it is important to note that the data on employment described below should be taken to mean employment of any sort, and for any duration, rather than full-time, or even permanent employment, which is the definition used by P/PV for the program.

In addition to simple descriptive statistics, P/PV also has conducted multivariate analysis on each of the employment, retention, and time to job measures. For the employment and retention measures, they employ a logistic regression model with site fixed effects. Such models appropriately account for the binary nature of the dependent measure, and compute the likelihood a given characteristic is associated with the outcome of interest. Results for these models are displayed using the log odds for each characteristic, such that a characteristic with an odds ratio of 1.09 implies a client with that characteristic is nine percent more likely to ever have been employed (or retained her employment) than a client without the characteristic. The use of such models and odds ratios are entirely appropriate for examining relationships between a set of independent measures and a dependent measure that is binary, as is the case for the employment outcomes. Thus, these analyses are consistent with standard statistical techniques for examining the relationship among multiple variables.

The final employment measure–time to first job–is also subjected to multivariate analysis. In this case, however, P/PV employs survival analysis rather than regression techniques. Survival analysis is used to model the distribution of a variable that measures the length of time until an event occurs (such as obtaining a job) and assess the dependence of this distribution on a set of independent measures. As such, it is an appropriate tool for assessing the factors that are related to the time it takes clients to obtain their first job. Further, P/PV properly includes all participants in their estimate, rather than censoring those who never find employment. Additionally, their analysis correctly uses transformations in order to ensure that each participant's time series begins with the first month s/he is both enrolled in the program and out of prison, since this represents the first month participants can have obtained employment with assistance from the program. Results are presented using hazard rates, which effectively display

odds ratios, such that a characteristic with a hazard rate of .65 implies that an individual with that characteristic is 35 percent less likely to find employment in a given month.

Recidivism

The calculation of recidivism outcomes is not subject to concerns about validity, simply because of the independent matching conducted by P/PV. As described in the previous chapter, the data on recidivism reported by grantees poses substantial concerns, in that they are not uniform and are generally collected only when an individual terminates from the program. But program data on recidivism are calculated based on the independent matching conducted by P/PV, which is conducted for each client who agrees to participate in the research study.[3] Further, this matching allows P/PV to identify which individuals have returned to prison as a result of a new offense. In so doing, the definition of recidivism computed for the program is consistent with prior research on studies of recidivism.

As noted in the previous chapter, this definition is among the narrower for such studies, thereby suggesting that the recidivism figures calculated represent a lower bound for recidivism and comparisons to other programs or other groups of offenders that might use alternate definitions of recidivism should be done cautiously.[4] Other possible indicators that could have been used to define and assess recidivism include being rearrested, being convicted of a new crime (with or without sentence to prison), and return to prison with or without a new sentence (adding, as an example, a return to prison for a violation of parole), each of which is likely to count a higher number of Ready4Work participants as recidivists. Further, the period of time in which an individual can recidivate can vary. Much of the prior research on recidivism has focused on a year-long period post-release, though some studies have also looked at lengthier periods. For example, the widely cited BJS study of prisoners released in 1994 examined recidivism for a three-year period following release (though it also reported on the percentages of prisoners who recidivated within six months, one year, and two years following release).

Nevertheless, the definition and time period used by P/PV are in line with measures used to document recidivism in other studies and, since the data collection is conducted consistently for all clients who agree to be in the study, the recidivism outcomes calculated by P/PV can be said

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[3] As noted in the prior chapter, fewer than five percent of all Ready4Work participants refuse to participate in the study.

[4] For example, in the widely cited BJS study of recidivism among prisoners released in 1994, there was a 10.4 percent recidivism rate within one year post-release when measured with the definition used in the Ready4Work program (and 25.4% within three years). This rate was the lowest of the four recidivism measures employed in that study; others ranged from 21.5 percent to 44.1 percent (or 46.9 percent to 67.5 percent within three years). Hence, the strict definition (the one similarly used for Ready4Work) yielded a recidivism rate from 11 percent to 34 percent lower than alternative definitions of recidivism despite each including the same individuals in the measure.

to be a valid indicator of this concept. Furthermore, widening the definition of recidivism and/or lengthening the period of time for which data are collected would have significantly expanded the cost and scope of the Ready4Work data collection efforts.

P/PV's analyses of these data only include descriptive statistics, reporting the percentage of Ready4Work participants who recidivated and comparing this to percentages among the national population of ex-offenders and to a smaller sample of 18 to 34 year-old African-American nonviolent felons. In doing so, they make clear that the comparisons are primarily illustrative, rather than strictly comparable. This is appropriate, given the unmeasured differences that may exist between the groups. As a result, the lack of a true comparison group will make it difficult to identify the impacts on recidivism of the Ready4Work program. Given the promising early results, described below, a study that includes a rigorous comparison group may well be a fruitful endeavor so that the impacts of the program can be more precisely estimated.

Comparison of Ready4Work Outcomes with Other Offenders' Outcomes

In addition to describing and assessing the methods used to calculate the key outcomes for the Ready4Work program, we also sought to compare these outcomes to those for similar offenders who did not participate in the program. In this section, we first discuss the outcomes calculated for the Ready4Work program. Next, we describe our efforts to collect such data for similar offenders, and then compare the results of our data collection on outcomes to those obtained for Ready4Work participants to provide some context for these outcomes.

Employment

Employment outcomes calculated by P/PV reveal that nearly sixty percent of all Ready4Work participants obtain employment at some point during their program participation.[5] Further, slightly more than forty percent (and 62 percent of those ever employed) are employed for three consecutive months, and slightly less than thirty percent (and 36 percent of those ever employed) were employed for six consecutive months. These data are shown in Table 1. Using data provided by P/PV, we were able to replicate each of these figures, which represent data collected through January 2006. Because we received data that were more recent by a few months, we also calculated these figures through April 2006. This yielded similar results, as more than 55 percent of all participants ever obtained employment, forty percent retained their employment for three consecutive months, and twenty-five percent retained employment for at least six months.

[5] These data, as well as those presented for recidivism below, are taken from the Interim Report for the Ready4Work program, submitted by P/PV to DOL in August 2006.

Table IV-1: Employment Outcomes Computed by P/PV

	Ever Employed	Employed 3 consecutive months	Employed 6 consecutive months
Percentage of Participants	58%	41%	29%
Percentage who ever found a job	-	62%	36%
Percentage who retained job for 3 consecutive months	-	-	52%

Source: Ready4Work Interim Report

Comparable data for similar offenders were difficult to obtain, largely because little data exist at the local level. Thus, for this section we present results on employment rates achieved by ex-offenders as documented in prior research. It should be noted, however, that because this study is not intended as a systematic review of prior research, the outcomes reported from other studies are taken at face value, and we do not assess the overall quality of the research nor the methods used to calculate outcomes in it. Generally speaking, prior work on offenders' employment suggests that, of those who receive employment-focused training or assistance, between sixty-five and seventy-five percent obtain some form of employment. In contrast, offenders who do not receive any assistance are less likely to find employment, as generally thirty-five to sixty percent of these offenders secure employment post-release.[6] Thus, the Ready4Work data for employment appear to be in-line with other research on offenders' employment outcomes.

Recidivism

Recidivism data calculated by P/PV indicate that Ready4Work participants very rarely return to prison as a result of a new sentence for at least the period during which they can be tracked. Specifically, only five percent of participants in the Ready4Work program recidivated within a year of their release. P/PV also notes that this figure compares favorably with offenders nationwide, who recidivate at more than twice this rate (10.4 percent) within a year of their release. Because the Ready4Work program serves only a specific subset of offenders (most importantly, in this case, non-violent offenders who have volunteered to participate in a program that provides them with training and other assistance), however, this comparison is imperfect.

[6] These data are taken from a recent review of studies that examined the outcomes of offenders who receive interventions attempting to promote employment and reduce recidivism. Though the study was conducted for the British Department of Education and Skills, it reports on the results from seven separate studies, many of which were conducted on U.S. offenders (and comparison groups for these offenders). Hurry, J., Brazier, L, Parker, M, and Wilson, A. (2006). "Rapid Evidence Assessment of Interventions that Promote Employment for Offenders" Department for Education and Skills. http://www.nicic.org/Library/021446.

To make comparisons between more directly comparable groups, P/PV also obtained information from the Bureau of Justice Statistics on the recidivism of 18 to 34 year old non-violent African-American felony offenders, since this represents the majority of the Ready4Work population. For this comparison, P/PV selected Ready4Work participants who matched these criteria. Only 6.3 percent of Ready4Work participants that met these criteria recidivated within a year of their release, as compared to 13.3 percent of those who met these criteria nationally.[7]

In each case, then, Ready4Work participants had lower rates of recidivism than the groups selected for comparison. As described above, however, neither of the two groups used as a comparison represent an ideal control group, as they may well differ from Ready4Work participants on any number of characteristics other than those measured. Clearly, the overall national group does not represent an ideal comparison in that it includes all age ranges, races, and types of offenses (including violent offenders). The smaller group–18 to 34-year-old non-violent African-American felony offenders–clearly shares a number of common characteristics with the Ready4Work population, especially when this population is limited only to those with these characteristics. However, there could be a large number of other differences between these two groups, aside from the fact that one group received Ready4Work services and the other did not.

For example, the self-selective, voluntary nature of the Ready4Work program may introduce bias, in the form of motivation or other unknown biases, in any statistical comparison of its participants with other offenders who did not voluntarily participate in a similar program. It is worth noting, however, that while participation in Ready4Work was voluntary, many men and women released from prison to correctional control are required to participate at least nominally in a program that provides supportive and training services that are similar to those offered by the Ready4Work program. Additionally, the limitation on comparisons with other offenders also should be considered in the context of the challenges faced by the individuals who participated in Ready4Work. By many of the objective measures, many Ready4Work participants were at a high risk of recidivating upon their release from prison, as the program served participants with a high rate of previous criminal activity, low levels of education, and a lack of many social supports that are associated with positive employment and recidivism outcomes.

For this study, we also attempted to collect data for offenders in areas served by Ready4Work grantees, since comparisons within the same jurisdiction help to provide some control for differences between laws, law enforcement strategies, justice systems, and sentencing guidelines across the country. As with the comparisons conducted by P/PV, these data must be seen as speculative, as there are likely to be a number of differences between the offenders for whom we

[7] Using the information provided to us by P/PV, we were able to replicate each of the Ready4Work recidivism figures reported in this section.

could collect additional data and those in the Ready4Work program, and it may be these differences which are the cause of different rates of recidivism rather than anything having to do with the program itself. Below, we describe our efforts to collect data on recidivism for the eleven communities in which the adult Ready4Work grantees were operating. Following this discussion, we present the comparison data we were able to collect in an effort to provide context for the recidivism rates for Ready4Work participants.

Data Collection Efforts

We attempted to collect recidivism data that matched as closely as possible the jurisdictions in which the Ready4Work grantees were operating, and also that included populations as similar to the participants served by the Ready4Work sites as we could. Our initial goal was to find background similarities in terms of sex, age, ethnicity, and the types of crimes committed. To do this, we sought out recidivism data from two primary sources: other programs we identified as operating in the same communities as the Ready4Work sites and providing services to offenders reentering their communities,[8] and from local city, county, or state jurisdictions.

There are at least three major challenges in seeking information at this level. The first is simply that there is very little data on recidivism of offenders that is available locally. Such figures generally are not tracked by city or county, and often not even by state. One state-level official with whom we spoke offered that his state "did not break down recidivism rates by counties because ex-offenders are likely not to be rearrested in the county from which they were released, so data broken up by county would be misleading." Other state and county officials simply told us that such data do not exist. The second challenge in collecting these data is that, given the paucity of local-level data on recidivism of offenders, what data do exist generally include all offenders and cannot be disaggregated to separate out only those with similar backgrounds to Ready4Work participants. Both challenges proved to be real complications in our effort to collect local recidivism data. Of the jurisdictions in which Ready4Work programs for adult offenders were operating, we could find only one of them that tracked the recidivism of offenders. In this site, the data could not be disaggregated by the type of crime committed, such that we could not separately examine the recidivism rates for offenders that more closely matched the characteristics of Ready4Work participants.

A third challenge in collecting data on recidivism is the variability in how it is measured. As noted above, there are at least four definitions of recidivism that are commonly used, and several others that an individual state or locality might adopt for its own use. Typically, in each definition, recidivism rates include the percentage of offenders who are rearrested within a given time following their release. However, localities differ in whether an individual counts toward

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[8] Through conversations with DOL, P/PV, and each of the grantees we visited, we could only identify a single agency that was providing similar services to a similar population. This is discussed below.

recidivism rates depending on whether the rearrest leads to new charges being filed, or to a conviction on new charges, or to a prison sentence based on this conviction. As noted above, each of these can be seen as a valid measure of recidivism, but because they vary in the level of involvement within the justice system, a higher or lower percentage of offenders will have recidivated depending on the choice of which measure to adopt. And the variation across jurisdictions in which definitions of recidivism are in use is substantial.

Comparison Data

Given the issues above, the recidivism data we obtained were very limited. We were able to obtain comparison data from a program similar to Ready4Work only in Detroit. The Transition of Prisoners (TOP) program is operated by a faith-based organization formerly with the Prison Fellowship Ministries. The TOP program provides employment services, mentoring, and referrals to partnering agencies in the Detroit area using a Biblical approach to rehabilitation. Participants' average program duration is seven months, and their backgrounds are similar to those served by the Ready4Work program.[9] According to an internal evaluation[10], in 2001-2002, the overall recidivism rate for graduates of this program was 21.7 percent. For this calculation, recidivism was measured by the percentage of program graduates who had a new conviction or a technical violation within 12 months after their initial contact with the TOP program. Interestingly, however, the recidivism rate represents only the 23 graduates of the 117 offenders who participated in their program. Thus, the vast majority of offenders served by the TOP program are not included in its recidivism measure. Note that the definition of recidivism used by this program is a much broader one than that used by Ready4Work, in that it includes technical violations. Despite the difference in definitions, though, America Works' (the Ready4Work grantee in Detroit) recidivism rate of less than one percent, and the overall Ready4Work program's rate of five percent, still compares quite favorably.

In addition to this single comparable program, we also sought to obtain data for offenders in each of the jurisdictions served by Ready4Work grantees. For this, we searched web sites and held conversations with representatives of county and state-level Departments of Correction or Parole in each of the sites. As noted above, these data, too, are scant. Such data were available on a countywide basis only in Duval County, Florida (the county in which the Jacksonville grantee operates). The Duval County Sheriff's Office tracks offenders who are rearrested in the county

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[9] One difference in this similarity is that the average age of a TOP graduate is 38, which is approximately ten years older than the Ready4Work participants in Detroit.

[10] *The Detroit TOP Program an Evaluation Report*, http://www.pfnz.org.nz/downloadables/OJ%20-%20The%20TOP%20Program%20-%202002%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf#search=%22Evaluation%20of%20Transition%20of%20Prisoner%20%22TOP%22%20in%20Detroit%22. 9/19/06

within 12 months of the date of their last release from jail or prison. Thus, an individual will not be counted as recidivating if s/he is rearrested anytime after 12 months, or if s/he is arrested outside Duval County. This likely lowers the overall recidivism rates for this population. In contrast, an individual is counted as recidivating if s/he is arrested, even if s/he is not convicted of a new crime, which likely increases the overall recidivism rate in comparison to data for Ready4Work participants. Additionally, the recidivism data in Duval County are not broken down by crime, so they include individuals who would not be eligible for the Ready4Work program (i.e., violent offenders or those older than 34). Despite these differences, these data represent the closest comparison we were able to obtain through our data collection efforts. In 2004, 36 percent of the 36,831 ex-offenders released from Duval County prisons were arrested again within a year. Once again, the Ready4Work participants compare quite favorably, as fewer than five percent of these participants return to prison as a result of a new sentence within a year of their release.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we summarized the methods by which P/PV calculates Ready4Work program outcomes. We noted that the data on which the outcomes are based appear to be quite reliable. Further, although there are some questions about the validity of the employment measure, the measures calculated are conceptually similar to those used for other employment and training programs, though other programs alleviate some of the limitations of this measure by also calculating an earnings measure that is not used in the Ready4Work program. Further, P/PV employs a narrow definition in the calculation of recidivism, which implies that estimates on this measure for the Ready4Work program likely represent a lower bound on the recidivism that occurs. Nevertheless, this definition is one that is commonly employed in assessing recidivism, so that even if it is a lower estimate than would be obtained with other definitions, it certainly is consistent with prior work on recidivism rates.

We also discussed the specific statistical and analytic methods employed by P/PV in their examination of the factors that affect outcomes. In each case, these methods are technically sound and appropriate for discerning associations among the multiple characteristics of interest in the analysis.

Finally, we presented the results that have been produced by P/PV. As part of this effort, we were able to replicate their figures, suggesting that the calculations had been completed properly and with sufficient documentation to allow replication by external reviewers. We also noted the comparisons P/PV used for the Ready4Work recidivism data, and presented some comparison data collected as part of this study. In each case, the Ready4Work program compares favorably. We note, though, as does P/PV in its Interim Report, that these favorable comparisons must be considered speculative at best, as there is no readily identifiable comparison group that would

allow for a precise estimate of the impacts of the program, because the characteristics of the groups and also the definitions of the outcomes differ. More precise conclusions about how Ready4Work participants' outcomes compare to other offenders will only be available should a study be conducted using a formal comparison group that is highly similar to Ready4Work participants and for whom identical or very similar outcomes data are collected.

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V. LESSONS LEARNED

Through this project, we have learned a number of lessons about the Ready4Work project, including some that could be considered promising practices worthy of replication and others that point out critical challenges in implementing and operating a program designed to increase the attachment of recently released offenders to the workforce and to reduce their further criminal involvement. In this chapter, we identify several of the key lessons learned from this effort to validate the data collected by and used to assess the performance of the Ready4Work program. In the first section, we identify some practices that we consider exemplary or that seemed to contribute substantially to the successful data collection and verification among grantees.

Promising Practices

One of the best practices observed in several of the sites was to have the project coordinator or other data manager serve as the single individual responsible for the management of the project's data. This means a single individual performs the data entry, runs queries, and forwards the monthly data updates to P/PV. While this does not necessarily ensure the data are more valid, because ultimately the data manager must rely on those collecting it for this accuracy, it does help to keep the database extremely well organized, and potentially erroneous data can be identified early and corrections can be made prior to submitting data to P/PV.

In contrast to this structure, early on in several projects, case managers and others had direct access to the project's database from their offices, and regularly made updates as new information was collected for a participant. Too often in this structure, the administrative staff person responsible for final data reporting was unaware of the new information that had been collected and would change the modifications made by a case manager back to the original. With so many individuals having access, there was substantial confusion as to what information in the database was the most current. There was also concern that the data were not being scrutinized enough before they were being entered. By taking responsibility as the single individual responsible for data management, the project coordinator or other data manager can eliminate these issues and, where this has occurred, staff noted that the overall quality and

completeness of the data has risen as a result. In addition, project coordinators that have taken on this role feel much more aware of how participants and the project are progressing as a result.

Another exemplary practice that has been implemented in Jacksonville is the use of monthly update meetings that are attended by all relevant staff, including case managers, the placement and training specialists, the mentor coordinator, and the MIS manager. These meetings ensure that all active participants are discussed and that all relevant information known about them can be included in the monthly update. The meetings were implemented approximately five months prior to our site visit, and all respondents agreed that it has made data collection efforts easier and more thorough.

Further, the grantee in Jacksonville has revised the organization of its case files. Through this revision, the files are now separated into six distinct sections (intake, mentor/client rights, education and training, employment, plan of care, and case notes) so that all information is easily located. On the cover of each file is a sheet that identifies the six sections and lists documents that should be included in all files. Next to each item in the list are boxes to check when a document has been included. In this way, without even opening the file one can quickly determine if there are missing documents that need to be collected. This organization and cover sheet has helped to ensure the files are complete and thorough. Indeed, the quality of data in the revised files (which included approximately forty percent of the files we selected for review in Jacksonville, or all the cases that had been active at the time of the revision) was significantly better than that of the earlier files, providing solid evidence that this method for maintaining case files is working well.

Another practice that has helped to ensure high quality data collection is to designate a single agency to provide as many of the supportive services as possible. Detroit has taken this approach, and staff within this site report that it has made it much simpler to verify what services a participant has received. As we learned in several sites, collecting data on services provided by outside agencies is a substantial challenge. When the majority, or all, outside services are provided by a single agency, particularly one with which the grantee has a strong working relationship, this process is made much simpler. Of course, this advantage must be weighed against the possibility that limiting service to those available in-house or through only a single outside agency will unnecessarily inhibit participants from obtaining other services that may be of great benefit to them.

As an example of this fact, in Philadelphia, the grantee's close relationship with the Philadelphia Office of Adult Probation has been of great benefit in its efforts to provide and document effective services. Especially because there have been several different agencies responsible for

the provision of services during the grant period, this relationship has given the project a source of consistency in data collection. Indeed, data for some clients were lost during the switch from one agency to another; this longstanding relationship allowed the grantee to recover at least some data for clients. Additionally, this relationship has allowed the grantee to have a reliable source for documenting whether clients have been arrested since their enrollment into the program.

Finally, a very promising practice that was implemented for all grantees was the development of a thorough and user-friendly management information system that can accurately capture a wide range of information about clients, the services they receive, and the outcomes they obtain. By developing this system, providing training to all grantees adopting it, and sharing on a monthly basis feedback on data quality and concerns about missing information, P/PV has helped to ensure that program data are as complete and accurate as possible. Clearly, not all initiatives have the benefit of such thorough documentation, and grantees agreed that the data system in place has been enormously helpful in capturing and reporting information on their clients, as well as managing their programs.

Challenges

The most significant challenge to collecting and maintaining high quality data has been retaining staff so that there is continuity in working with clients and collecting information from them. In the two sites in which there has been substantial turnover, including one in which the agency providing the services has shifted twice and the other in which nearly all staff have been replaced (often more than once), the quality of the data collection has been lower and, indeed, many of the files selected for review could not be located. In the two sites that have had more stability in their staff, data quality is better and the procedures in place have resulted in stronger verification of those data.

Another challenge noted by two of the grantees in our sample was that the original database designed by P/PV did not allow grantees to run queries, which made it difficult to gain valuable information about the clients in a given program. Without this function, some grantees opted to develop a second database that would enable them to run queries designed to provide information about their clients, the services they receive, and the outcomes they obtain. Further, such queries allow projects to identify missing data, alert them when they need to make contact with clients, and identify which clients have found employment or recidivated. Subsequent iterations of the P/PV database have included the capacity to run queries, which has diminished this concern, but because the initial database did not provide this function, tracking and managing clients who enrolled early in the program was more complicated and, perhaps as a

result, as described in Chapter 3 the data collection and completeness for these clients was of lower quality.

A further challenge has been the decision on when to enroll clients into the program. As described above, clients are eligible to enroll in Ready4Work as early as 90 days prior to their release and as late as 90 days subsequent to it. In all sites we visited, staff from the project routinely recruited clients while they were incarcerated and, in many cases, tried to enroll clients who were within 90 days of their release date. In Jacksonville, however, many of those who expressed a desire to participate in the program, and were thus enrolled, never showed up to participate in the project upon their release. Because of this, the project had many "enrolled" clients who received few or no services, and they could not document whether the individuals found employment or recidivated. As a result, the program decided to no longer enroll individuals prior to their release. Although they still will meet with clients who are incarcerated, these clients are told that to actually enroll in the program they must come to the offices upon their release to complete the intake form. Staff believe this process ensures the individual is motivated enough to participate in the project. Since this decision has been implemented, staff report that the number of clients who cannot be located has been reduced substantially.

Another significant challenge has been documenting birth dates and social security numbers because participants often have no formal identification. Despite the efforts of staff to assist their clients in locating and producing these documents, often these efforts do not succeed and staff must simply rely on the attestation of the client as verification for this information.

At least one site also noted that there was too little focus initially on data collection and verification. Although this has clearly shifted as the program has matured, the early lack of emphasis helped, according to this grantee, to foster an ambivalent attitude about data collection and verification, and staff interpreted this as suggesting that these issues were not a priority. This ambivalence has been difficult to overcome even as greater emphasis on data collection has developed during the program.

Additionally, at least two of the sites reported that the trainings provided by P/PV over the phone were not productive; instead, these grantees believe they would have benefited far more by participating in in-person workshops. Because the grantees acknowledged that this would have been far more expensive than the conference calls that were used, these two grantees argued that the training would even have been more effective if it had been offered to each site one at a time rather than a call involving all 12 sites. These grantees simply felt that with so many grantees and staff on the call, there was insufficient time to ask questions and get clarification on important issues.

Interestingly, given the desire to receive individual training, these same sites regretted the fact that there was very little interaction among grantees. They believed that further interaction among the individual sites would have provided valuable opportunities to learn more about how each site collected, documented, and verified data, as well as how other sites effectively provided services. Thus, creating such opportunities may have allowed sites to learn from each other and share effective practices as they developed during the program.

Finally, one challenge for understanding what have been the outcomes of the program is that there is no threshold for counting someone as being employed. Thus, a client could be placed for only one or two days of work during a given month and this would be counted as a successful placement. While it is true that the regular interval follow-up would identify if a client were no longer working, there is little way to know how long that person worked, or for how long the job was available. Although P/PV recently added the number of hours worked as a variable to be updated monthly, there was little evidence in the case files that the electronic data for this item were supported by any documentation. Further, because this item was added only recently, most of the files we reviewed had no such information at all. Thus, it is unclear what an employment rate of, for example, 70% means, as the threshold for counting employment is quite low. In at least one site we visited, staff is eager to place participants even in occasional work assignments that are known to be very short-term in duration (i.e., one to two days of work). While there may well be value to providing these clients with work experience, even if it is temporary, much of the electronic data do not contain sufficient information to capture important nuances in the employment obtained.

Ultimately, counting a participant that has secured any work as employed does not distinguish the Ready4Work program from many other employment and training programs. As a result, this method for documenting employment does not undermine the outcomes observed. However, most other employment and training programs also calculate a post-program earnings measure, which helps to lessen the limitations inherent in the employment measure. Adopting a similar measure for the Ready4Work program, or otherwise making further distinctions among the types of employment obtained by participants, would improve our understanding of the variation in outcomes obtained by Ready4Work participants.

Finally, perhaps the most significant concern identified from this review is that, although the data in the reviewed case files and the electronic data appeared to be consistent in the vast majority of cases, there was little in the way of documentation of them other than notes in the case files. While this does not mean that the data are inaccurate, there is little to which grantees can point that supports what is contained in the files. Stronger documentation efforts would certainly increase confidence in the overall accuracy of the information.

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ATTACHMENT 1:
READY4WORK CASE FILE REVIEW WORKSHEET

Instructions: *The "MIS Reported Data" column contains information on the participant's background, outcomes, and services received. Information in this column is filled in for the site visitor from the electronic MIS. Check through the paper case file to corroborate the data found in the MIS. Circle "YES" or "NO" depending on whether or not the data reported in the paper file matches the data in the MIS. In the "Supporting Data" column, circle all the codes that correspond to the sources of the supporting data found. In addition, if you find a source that is not included in the column, please circle 5 for "Other" and describe the source in the "Notes/Other Sources" column.*

Example: *If you are corroborating employment status, a case file may contain case management notes attesting to employment and copies of pay stubs. You should circle number 1 and 4 in the "Supporting Data" column.*

Note*: If the data does not match, there is no need to circle a Supporting Data code.*

Source Codes

Code	Definition	Code	Definition
0	No supporting data	**3**	Verbal confirmation (from training provider/mentor/employer *i.e. phone call*)
1	Case Notes (*Including unsigned intake and referral forms and training plans*)	**4**	Documentation (*Including letter from training provider/mentor/probation officer, pay stubs, attendance records*)
2	Self Attestation (*Including participant signed intake and referral forms and training plans*)	**5**	Other (*Please explain in the next column*.)

Site Info

Site	**Date**
Participant	**Site Visitor**

Participant's Name _____

I. Background Information

	MIS Reported Data	Match	Supporting Data	Notes/Other Sources
DOB		1= YES 2= NO		
Race		1= YES 2= NO		
Sex		1= YES 2= NO		
Enrollment Date		1= YES 2= NO		
Release Date		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	

Participant's Name ____________________________

II. OUTCOMES: Employment Status

	MIS Reported Data	Match	Supporting Data	Notes/Other Sources
Employment (Month/Year)	Employed Y/N Hourly Wage $____ Receives Fringe Y/N Start Date ________	1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Employment (Month/Year)	Employed Y/N Hourly Wage $____ Receives Fringe Y/N Start Date ________	1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Employment (Month/Year)	Employed Y/N Hourly Wage $____ Receives Fringe Y/N Start Date ________	1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Employment (Month/Year)	Employed Y/N Hourly Wage $____ Receives Fringe Y/N Start Date ________	1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Employment (Month/Year)	Employed Y/N Hourly Wage $____ Receives Fringe Y/N Start Date ________	1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	

Participant's Name ____________________________

II. OUTCOMES: Employment Status

	MIS Reported Data	Match	Supporting Data	Notes/Other Sources
Employment (Month/Year)	Employed Y/N Hourly Wage $____ Receives Fringe Y/N Start Date ________	1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Employment (Month/Year)	Employed Y/N Hourly Wage $____ Receives Fringe Y/N Start Date ________	1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Employment (Month/Year)	Employed Y/N Hourly Wage $____ Receives Fringe Y/N Start Date ________	1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Employment (Month/Year)	Employed Y/N Hourly Wage $____ Receives Fringe Y/N Start Date ________	1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	

Participant's Name ______________________________

III. OUTCOMES: Recidivism

	MIS Reported Data	Match	Supporting Data	Note/Other Sources
Incarcerated (MONTH/YEAR)		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Incarcerated (MONTH/YEAR)		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Incarcerated (MONTH/YEAR)		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Incarcerated (MONTH/YEAR)		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Incarcerated (MONTH/YEAR)		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	

Participant's Name ______________________________

III. OUTCOMES: Recidivism

	MIS Reported Data	Match	Supporting Data	Note/Other Sources
Incarcerated (MONTH/YEAR)		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Incarcerated (MONTH/YEAR)		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Incarcerated (MONTH/YEAR)		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Incarcerated (MONTH/YEAR)		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Incarcerated (MONTH/YEAR)		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	

Participant's Name _____

IV. SERVICES RECEIVED: During Program Participation

	MIS Reported Data	Matched	Supporting Data	Notes/Other Sources
Ever Received Case Management		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Ever Received Mentoring		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Ever Received Employment Services		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	

Participant's Name _____

V. SERVICES RECEIVED: First Selection (MONTH/YEAR)

	MIS Reported Data	Match	Supporting Data	Notes/Other Sources
Monthly Status		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Case Management		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Mentoring		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Employment Basic Skills		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	

Participant's Name _____

V. SERVICES RECEIVED: Second Selection (MONTH/YEAR)

	MIS Reported Data	Match	Supporting Data	Notes/Other Sources
Monthly Status		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Case Management		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Mentoring		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Employment Basic Skills		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	

Participant's Name _____

V. SERVICES RECEIVED: Third Selection (MONTH/YEAR)

	MIS Reported Data	Match	Supporting Data	Notes/Other Sources
Monthly Status		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Case Management		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Mentoring		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	
Employment Basic Skills		1= YES 2= NO	0= No supp data 1= Case notes 2= Self Attestation 3= Verbal Confirmation 4= Documentation 5= Other	