

PROJECT OVERVIEW

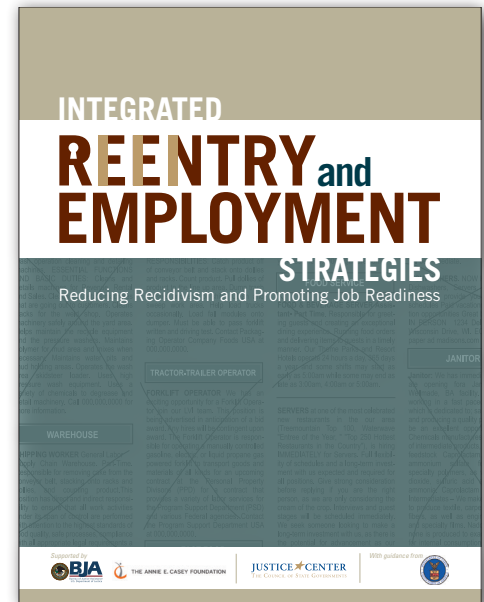
Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies: *Reducing Recidivism and Promoting Job Readiness*

Policymakers across the political spectrum agree that for people released from prison or jail, employment can be the gateway to successful reentry. Some evidence supports that reentering individuals are more likely to be reincarcerated if they are unemployed,¹ and these individuals report that a job is key to avoiding criminal activity.² Nevertheless, the barriers that millions of adults with criminal records face as they seek to enter the U.S. workforce, especially in a weak job market, are extensive and well documented.³

Although employment can play a critical role in reducing recidivism, research has shown that simply placing someone in a job is not a silver bullet for preventing reoffending. To help clients with criminal histories avoid reincarceration and succeed in the workplace, employment programs will need to move beyond traditional services to address individuals' underlying attitudes about crime and work that make them both more likely to reoffend and to have problems getting and keeping a job.

The good news is that there is a foundation of research that reveals effective strategies for reducing recidivism. These strategies include using evidence-based tools to assess individuals' risk for criminal behavior and using that information to tailor services to their distinct needs (such as cognitive behavioral therapy to address antisocial thinking and behaviors). At the same time, the workforce development field has been testing interventions to engage hard-to-employ adults in the workplace, including people with criminal histories. The results demonstrate the importance of matching services to individuals' levels of job readiness. While some individuals may only need help with conducting a job search, others will need to attend GED classes, obtain intensive training on workplace skills, and even be enrolled in paid, transitional work. The problem is that these recidivism-reduction and workforce development advancements have been made largely on parallel tracks with limited coordination. What is needed is an integrated approach that both systems can use to triage their scarce resources in ways that reduce reincarceration and improve employability for their shared population.

The *Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies* white paper recognizes that corrections, reentry, and workforce service providers cannot successfully serve every adult on probation or leaving prison or jail who needs a job. There are simply not enough resources to do so and attempting to serve everyone would be largely ineffective. Also, some



To help corrections, workforce, and reentry administrators and practitioners navigate the complex issues related to coordinated planning and service delivery, the Council of State Governments Justice Center, in collaboration with the Center for Employment Opportunities, developed a white paper on integrating reentry and employment strategies using a resource-allocation and service-matching tool. The work was conducted with the leadership and support of a public-private partnership involving the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, with guidance from the Employment and Training Administration at the U.S. Department of Labor.

individuals require intensive services and programming, while others perform better with lighter interventions and supervision. This white paper helps policymakers, system administrators, and practitioners collaboratively determine whether resources are focused on the right people, with the right interventions, and at the right time.

Coordinating Corrections and Workforce Development Responses: The Tool

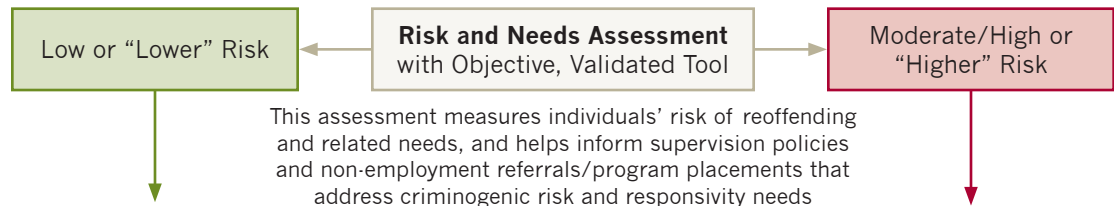
The white paper introduces the Resource-Allocation and Service-Matching Tool, which is based on two key dimensions—an individual’s risk of reoffending (criminogenic risk) and job readiness. There are four groupings that result from assessing individuals under correctional control along these dimensions. Each group can be assigned a combination of employment program components and service-delivery strategies that are tailored to individuals’ risk for criminal activity and complemented by corrections interventions.

How to Use the Tool: Assessing for Risk of Reoffending and Job Readiness

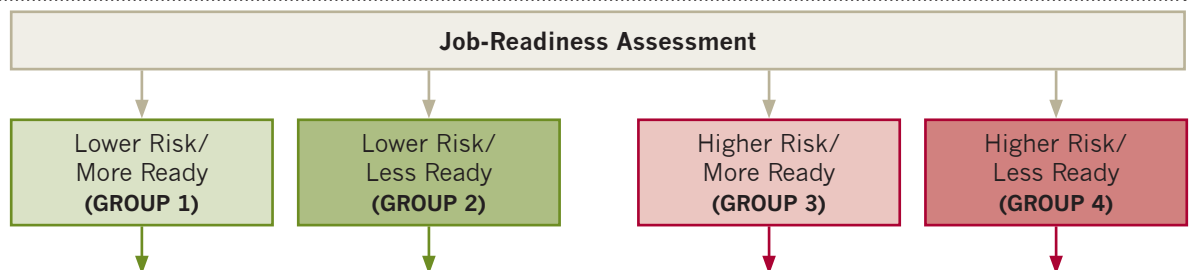
The tool relies on validated corrections assessments to identify factors associated with individuals’ increased risk for criminal activity (such as antisocial peers or substance abuse). These assessments also detect individuals’ responsivity needs (such as mental illness or learning disorders) that can interfere with interventions, and can be used to inform how supervision and programming resources can be properly prioritized for higher-risk individuals to reduce their risk of reoffending.⁴ Similarly, workforce development screenings—often a series of questions about past employment and education or skill levels—can help identify areas of need. The information is used to focus intensive job-readiness interventions on groups with characteristics that put them at a disadvantage in the workforce (such as limited work history and low levels of education or occupational training).⁵

The Resource-Allocation and Service-Matching Tool

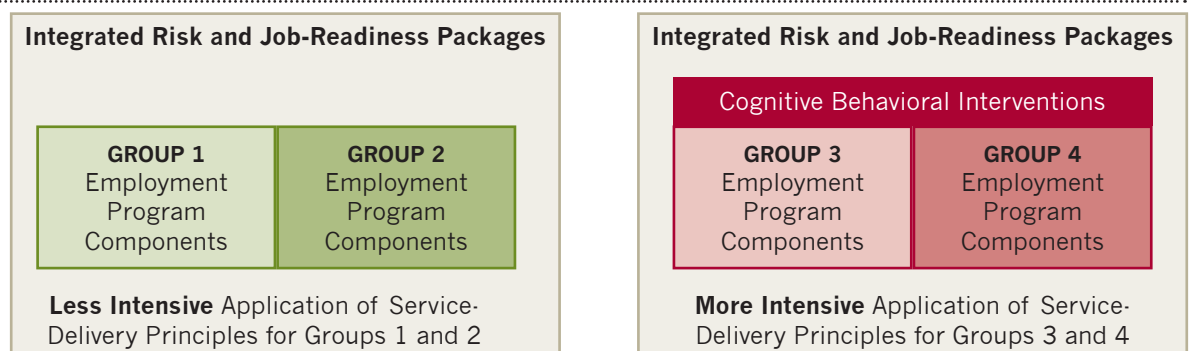
Step 1: Assess Risk and Needs



Step 2: Assess Job Readiness



Step 3: Deliver Targeted Services



Because the tool groups individuals first by risk and then by readiness, resources are more efficiently focused where they can be most effective. For example, a higher-risk person returning from prison that has limited work experience and negative attitudes about legitimate employment will receive intensive, structured services that complement close supervision. In contrast, a lower-risk individual with a history of successful employment will benefit from minimal supervision and may need little beyond assistance writing a resume or reinstating a driver's license.

Delivering Integrated Services: Addressing Risk Factors and Job-Readiness Needs

Employment Program Components: The white paper outlines eight types of programming:

1. Education and Training
2. Soft/Cognitive-Skill Development
3. Transitional-Job Placements
4. Non-skill-Related Interventions
5. Non-transitional Subsidized Employment
6. Job Development and Coaching
7. Retention and Advancement Services
8. Financial Work Incentives

Principles of Service Delivery: Simply delivering one or more of the eight program components will not necessarily improve employment or recidivism outcomes. Program services must also address risk-related attitudes and behaviors to better position individuals with criminal histories to succeed in the labor market.⁶ To that end, the white paper describes five service-delivery principles that can be applied to employment programs with more or less intensity to reflect different risk levels:

1. *Engagement: Address antisocial thinking and behavior through high-impact staff and client interactions (e.g., mentoring relationships or cognitive-based interventions).*
2. *Timing: Provide services shortly before or at the time of release, or at the start of community supervision, to address individuals' immediate problems, and adapt the services to individuals' changing needs over time.*
3. *Incentives: Increase motivation for positive change and improve job performance with such measures as stipends for maintaining employment and peer-supported recognition for program completion.*
4. *Coordination: Collaborate with corrections, workforce, and reentry professionals and other service providers to ensure that interventions are provided in ways that support recidivism-reduction and employment goals.*
5. *Structured Time: Organize individuals' time with effective programming and positive activities to minimize opportunities for criminal actions and time with antisocial peers.*

Risk and Readiness Profiles: Tailoring Services to Match Distinct Needs

The following two examples demonstrate how services differ based on the tool's groupings (more detailed examples and service packages appear in the white paper):

Accounting for different levels of risk (with the same level of job readiness):

A Group 2 and 4 service comparison

GROUP 2:
Lower Risk/
Less Job Ready

GROUP 4:
Higher Risk/
Less Job Ready

Groups 2 and 4 both need services that promote job readiness and connections to the labor force, but they have different risk levels. Group 4 (higher risk) needs more structured services that are infused with cognitive behavioral-based approaches. They should meet frequently with their job coach and be closely supervised. Group 2 services should be less structured and supervised, but still promote readiness (e.g., education and training rather than intensive transitional-job placement). Group 2, however, should not be placed with Group 4 into intensive classes, as this increases Group 2's risk of reoffending.

Accounting for different job-readiness levels (with the same level of risk):

A Group 3 and 4 service comparison

GROUP 3:
Higher Risk/
More Job Ready

GROUP 4:
Higher Risk/
Less Job Ready

Group 3 and 4 individuals need services delivered in ways that intensely address risk, such as close supervision and cognitive behavioral-based approaches that promote positive workplace behaviors and attitudes. However, because they have different readiness levels, their time should be structured using different employment programming. For example, Group 4 individuals need program components that promote job readiness (e.g., basic education or transitional-job placement), whereas Group 3 is better served through highly structured job coaching, development, and post-placement services.

This white paper can help corrections, reentry, and workforce professionals by

- **stimulating discussions** among policymakers and administrators about how to achieve workforce and recidivism-reduction goals and identify gaps in existing efforts. It provides policymakers and administrators with a shared language for establishing cross-systems policies and practices;
- **helping policymakers and practitioners make more informed resource-allocation decisions** by using the tool to group individuals by risk and need and then leveraging each system's investments;
- **positioning workforce service providers to help reduce recidivism and stabilize neighborhoods** where the majority of individuals leaving prison or jail return by integrating service-delivery principles that address risk into their employment programs; and
- **encouraging corrections and reentry professionals to more fully explore** the outlined employment programming options to structure probationers' and parolees' time.

Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies: Reducing Recidivism and Promoting Job Readiness and related resources are available at csgjusticecenter.org/reentry/the-reentry-and-employment-project.

The Council of State Governments Justice Center is a national nonprofit organization that serves policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels from all branches of government. It provides practical, nonpartisan advice and evidence-based, consensus-driven strategies to increase public safety and strengthen communities (see csgjusticecenter.org).

1. Christy Visser, Sara Debus, and Jennifer Yahner, *Employment after Prison: A Longitudinal Study of Releasees in Three States* (Washington: Urban Institute, 2008); Shelli B. Rossman and Caterina G. Roman, "Case-Managed Reentry and Employment: Lessons from the Opportunity to Succeed Program" *Justice Research and Policy* 5, no. 2 (2003): 75–100.

2. Individuals leaving correctional facilities report that employment is one of the greatest factors in their abiding by the law on release. Demelza Baer, et al., *Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry: Research Findings from the Urban Institute's Prisoner Reentry Portfolio* (Washington: Urban Institute, 2006).

3. Harry J. Holzer, Steven Raphael, and Michael A. Stoll, "Employment Barriers Facing Ex-Offenders," presented at *Reentry Roundtable on the Employment Dimensions of Prisoner Reentry: Understanding the Nexus between Prisoner Reentry and Work*, New York University, May 19–20, 2003, available at urban.org/UploadedPDF/410855_holzer.pdf.

4. Christopher T. Lowenkamp and Edward J. Latessa, "Understanding the Risk Principle: How and Why Correctional Interventions can Harm Low-Risk Offenders" *Topics in Community Corrections* (2004): 3–8.

5. Charles Michalopoulos and Christine Schwartz, *National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies What Works Best for Whom: Impacts of 20 Welfare-to-Work Programs by Subgroup* (Washington: Office of the Assistance Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

6. Edward J. Latessa, "Why Work is Important and How to Improve the Effectiveness of Correctional Reentry Programs that Target Employment," *Criminology and Public Policy* 11, no. 1 (2012): 87–91.