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**Provide inmates with opportunities to participate in work assignments and skill-building programs that build toward successful careers in the community.**

The preceding policy statement, Education and Vocational Training, addressed the value of teaching skills to prisoners and providing them with a basic (and sometimes advanced) education. Jobs that build towards a career and make prisoners more marketable to employers upon release should be made available inside prisons and jails to complement these education and training programs. Correctional work assignments that are offered without attention to labor market demands, such as cleaning and furniture-making, typically do not prepare prisoners for the skilled jobs available in the communities to which they will return. By considering the local labor market and expanding the range of work assignments to include volunteer, pre-apprenticeship, and work-release programs, corrections administrators are more likely to provide people in prison and jail with the skills and experience necessary to obtain gainful employment in the community.

## research highlights

**Just over half of the prison population works while incarcerated.**

In 2000, 53 percent of state and federal prisoners (48 percent and 100 percent, respectively) who were eligible and able to work had a work assignment.<sup>147,148</sup> The type and required skill level of work conducted by people in prison varies. The vast majority was assigned to general maintenance positions (39 percent of state prisoners; 83 percent of federal prisoners). Smaller numbers worked in correctional industry programs (6 percent and 23 percent) and in farming or agricultural work assignments (3 percent and 0.2 percent). Work assignments are less common in jails—not surprising given the short length of stay for many inmates. About one quarter of people in jail have institution-based jobs.<sup>149</sup>

Another category of correctional work is work release. Work-release programs that permit soon-to-be-released individuals to work outside the prison walls during the day and to return to the prison or a halfway house in the evenings were popular with departments of corrections through the 1970s. More recently, poor research results (*e.g.*, failure to realize cost-savings and no decrease in recidivism rates), a decline in federal funding, and political concern about high-profile re-offending by work-release inmates have reduced the prevalence of such programs.<sup>150</sup> In 2000, less than a third of all correctional institutions operated work-release programs, and only about two percent of the nation's inmates participated in them.<sup>151</sup>

**The type of work assignments available to inmates often does not match the employment needs in the local labor market.**

The general maintenance positions filled by most people in prison or jail are less likely than jobs in prison industries to provide participants with marketable skills that will lead to successful careers. The jobs that are believed to be most effective at providing skills are those that produce goods and services that are sold in the commercial market. But only a small percentage of prisoners can participate in such work due to a limited number of slots. For example, the Prison Industry Enhancement (PIE) program, which operates in 572 state (482), federal (68), and private (22) facilities, includes partnerships with private companies to provide jobs for people in prison or jail.<sup>152</sup> However, the PIE programs provide space for only about three-tenths of one percent of the state prison population.

**147** Camille Camp and George M. Camp, *The Corrections Yearbook 2000* (Middletown, CT: Criminal Justice Institute, 2000).

**148** Rob Atkinson and Knut A. Rostad, *Can Inmates Become an Integral Part of the US Workforce?* (paper presented at Urban Institute's Reentry Roundtable, New York, May 2003). Eligible and able inmates are those who are not on a security- or medical-restricted status.

**149** C. W. Harlow, *Profile of Jail Inmates, 1996*, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington, DC: 1998), NCJ 164620.

**150** Work-release programs have not been rigorously evaluated. The most ambitious study was an evaluation of Washington State's program, where participants served the final four to six months of their prison sentence in a community-based work-release facility. They were required to work, submit to drug testing, observe curfews, and return to the institution at night. A random assignment evaluation found that recidivism rates for the participants and the control group were about the same. In addition, the program did not save money. Susan Turner and Joan Petersilia,

*Work Release: Recidivism and Corrections Costs in Washington State*, National Institute of Justice Research in Brief (Washington DC: The National Institute of Justice, 1996).

**151** James J. Stephan and Jennifer C. Karberg, *Census of State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 2000*, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington DC: 2003), NCJ 198272.

**152** *Ibid.*

## Research suggests numerous benefits from correctional work programs.

Studies indicate that recidivism rates for those who participate in prison industry or receive vocational instruction or apprenticeship training are lower than for those who do not participate.<sup>153</sup> Additionally, recidivism rates of participants in prison education, vocation, and work programs have been found to be 20 to 60 percent lower than those of nonparticipants.<sup>154</sup> Participants in work programs are more likely to both be employed following release and to have higher earnings than nonparticipants.<sup>155</sup> In addition, corrections officials report that reduced idleness leads to reduced tension within correctional facilities.<sup>156</sup> For example, a 1991 analysis of more than 7,000 program participants over a two-year period found that those who received training and work experience while in prison had fewer conduct problems and were less likely to be arrested the first year after release.<sup>157</sup> Jobs also allow individuals to learn workplace habits and practice their skills. The wages earned, particularly in industries and work-release jobs, help those in prison and jail and their dependents financially and allow them to contribute to court costs and restitution. In addition, these earnings provide prisoners with a sense of accomplishment, benefiting them emotionally and psychologically.<sup>158</sup>

## recommendations

### A | Provide work assignments in prison or jail that correspond to the needs of the employment market.

Appropriate work assignments in prison and jail can help prepare individuals for postrelease employment and successful re-entry to the community. Most prisoners are assigned some work duties while incarcerated, but typically there are not enough jobs available to give each person a significant amount of work. Even when there are work opportunities, they rarely provide a meaningful work experience. In many corrections departments, for instance, job development focuses on the day-to-day needs of the facility

153 William Saylor and Gerald Gaes, *The Effect of Prison Employment and Vocational/Apprenticeship Training on Long-Term Recidivism*, US Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons (Washington, DC: 1992).

154 David Wilson, Catherine Gallagher, and Doris MacKenzie, "A Meta-Analysis of Corrections-Based Education, Vocation, and Work Programs for Adult Offenders," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 37 (2001): 347–68; Shawn Bushway, "Employment Dimensions of Reentry" (paper presented at the Urban Institute's Reentry Roundtable, May 2003); Kim Hull et al., "Analysis of Recidivism Rates for Participants of the Academic/Vocational/Transition Education Programs Offered by the Virginia Department of Correctional Education," *Journal of Correctional Education* 51, no. 2 (2000): 256–61.

155 Kenneth Adams et al., "A Large-Scale Multidimensional Test of the Effect of Prison Education on Prisoners' Behavior," *The Prison Journal* 74, no. 4 (1994): 433–449; Steven Steurer, Linda Smith, and Alice Tracy, *Three State Recidivism Study* (Lanham, MD: Correctional Educational Association, 2001).

156 Rob Atkinson and Knut A. Rostad, "Can Inmates Become an Integral Part of the US Workforce?" (paper presented at Urban Institute's Reentry Roundtable, New York, May 2003).

157 William Saylor and Gerald Gaes, *The Effect of Prison Employment and Vocational/Apprenticeship Training on Long-Term Recidivism*, US Federal Bureau of Prisons (Washington, DC: 1992).

158 Rob Atkinson and Knut A. Rostad, "Can Inmates Become an Integral Part of the US Workforce?" (paper presented at Urban Institute's Reentry Roundtable, New York, May 2003).

or provides a way to stem the tide of institutional idleness. Rarely are work assignments made that correspond to employment opportunities outside the institution.

To begin addressing this problem, corrections administrators need to coordinate work assignments with institutional job training programs. Training and work should be developed in tandem, so work assignments can make use of skills that a person in prison or jail receives as part of his or her institutional vocational training. (See Policy Statement 15, Education and Vocational Training, for more on training in a jail or prison setting.) As always, the programming plan provides the roadmap for a person's preparation for re-entry during his or her incarceration. Each programming plan should contemplate the individual's education, vocational training, and work assignment on a continuum, with an eye towards making him or her more employable in the community. (See Policy Statement 9, Development of Programming Plan, for more on creating a personalized plan for institutional programming.)

**EXAMPLE: Employment and Employability Skills Program, Correctional Services of Canada**

Canada's Employment and Employability Skills Program starts at intake with a vocational assessment and a correctional plan. Inmates must have at least an eighth grade education to qualify, and they are assigned to work projects that help them develop competencies required for employment in the contemporary job market. Program participants are positioned to obtain short-term, generic certifications instead of more traditional, longer-term trades. The program represents a shift in focus away from solely operational needs of the institution because it considers the needs of the individual in designing work assignments.

In addition to focusing on individuals' skills, corrections administrators need to consider the existing job market. Administrators should partner with community-based workforce and employment services providers to identify gaps in the employment pool and create work programs to help fill those gaps. As administrators cultivate correctional industries or relationships with external companies, they can secure additional, more meaningful work opportunities and learn what skills would be transferable to the business community. By focusing on the needs of the community, corrections administrators can avoid channeling large numbers of prisoners into work assignments, such as furniture repair, for which there is little demand outside of the facility. At the same time, staff may develop new work programs such as computer repair and landscaping, which meet needs inside the prison and provide participants with useful, employable skills upon their re-entry to the community.

**EXAMPLE: Apprenticeship Program, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction**

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction currently has 58 apprenticeship programs in operation in the 30 correctional institutions in Ohio under the auspices of the Ohio Multi-Crafts Joint Apprenticeship Council. A statewide advisory committee makes recommendations for program selection or modification; the committee was formed to ensure that apprenticeship programming would offer skills that are marketable upon release.

Completions of the apprenticeship programs can take from 2,000 to 10,000 hours depending on the requirements of the program. Since many individuals do not have enough time on their sentence to complete an entire apprenticeship program, the ODRC issues a 50 percent certificate that participants can take to a potential employer after release to show that some skills have been attained.

To complicate the issue for corrections administrators, prison-based industries, which have traditionally provided work opportunities to people who are incarcerated, have recently faced accusations of competing unfairly with small and mid-sized community businesses. With this in mind, program administrators should consider alternatives to traditional correctional industries. These alternatives may include partnerships with private businesses that allow some work to be conducted within the correctional facility under contract with the private business. Targeting industry jobs to economic sectors that need labor can help alleviate criticism. Even in a depressed economy, certain economic sectors may experience labor shortages. Sometimes these jobs would not sustain an individual outside of the institution, but they can at least provide experience and skills to the prisoner that can aid in his or her search for a better position upon release.

Partnering with external companies will be vital to the success of prison work experience programs. Companies can set up small training shops inside the prison. Once released, the person can go to work for the larger plant on the outside. Businesses have an incentive to participate; the inmate is already trained and is able to begin working for the larger company immediately.

**EXAMPLE: Apprenticeship Programs,**  
North Carolina Department of Labor and Department of Corrections

The Department of Labor coordinates apprenticeship programs through which North Carolina residents can earn certification in skilled industries. Apprenticeship programs are established by private employers or under the sponsorship of joint labor-management committees. Through coordination between the Department of Labor and the Department of Corrections, prisoners are enrolled in training and able to gain work experience in such areas as printing and construction/engineering.

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**B | Develop pre-apprenticeship work assignments which provide a clear path into community-based apprenticeship programs in high demand occupations.**

Creating opportunities for people in prison or jail to participate in pre-apprenticeship programs that will allow them to transition immediately into formal apprenticeship programs or make available other job prospects upon release is an effective way to engage individuals in workforce training. Partnerships can be explored with federal apprenticeship programs, labor unions, and other hosts of apprenticeships. Such programs are approximately 13 weeks in length, and can be initiated in the final six months of incarceration for interested and approved inmates. Pre-apprenticeships have the benefit of giving clear incentives and career paths to

those who know that upon release they will be eligible for enrollment in an apprenticeship program leading to a full-time, well-paying position in a demand occupation.

**EXAMPLE: Prison Pet Partnership Program, Washington State Corrections Center for Women, Washington State University, and Tacoma Community College**

The Prison Pet Partnership Program is a cooperative effort among Washington State University, Tacoma Community College, the Washington State Department of Corrections, trainers, and volunteers. This program helps people at the Washington State Corrections Center for Women learn how to train, groom, and board dogs that can assist people with disabilities. Many of the women who participate in the program do so as part of an apprenticeship program, and many achieve Pet Care Technician certification through the American Boarding Kennels Association or Companion Animal Hygienist certification under the auspices of the World Wide Pet Supply Association.

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**c | Establish work programs that involve nonprofit, volunteer, and community service organizations so that participants can gain work experience without competing with other potential employees in the community.**

Partnering with nonprofit, volunteer, and community service organizations to provide work experience to prisoners can produce many of the benefits that similar partnerships bring to job skills programming. For people in prison or jail, relationships with these organizations can provide both meaningful work experiences during their incarceration and a foothold of civic support (or even employment) in the community after release. Another advantage to placing people who are incarcerated in nonprofit sector work programs is that it allows corrections officials to avoid displacing unemployed workers outside of the correctional facility with lower wage, incarcerated workers. Further, the work itself gives prisoners a chance to benefit the community. Thus, like partnering with private companies that cannot fill labor demand, partnering with nonprofit public agencies and community service organizations can provide people in prison or jail with meaningful work experience without incurring public opposition.

**EXAMPLE: California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Los Angeles County Fire Department, and California Department of Correction**

More than half of California's 3,800 full-time wildland firefighters are prisoners living in "conservation camps." Participants earn \$1.45 per day working on civic projects, and \$1 per hour for responding to emergencies, as they work off sentences for nonviolent crimes such as theft and drug possession. The program has 4,100 people in 38 conservation camps: 33 operated by the state Department of Forestry, five by Los Angeles County. Three of the camps—two state and one county—are for women.

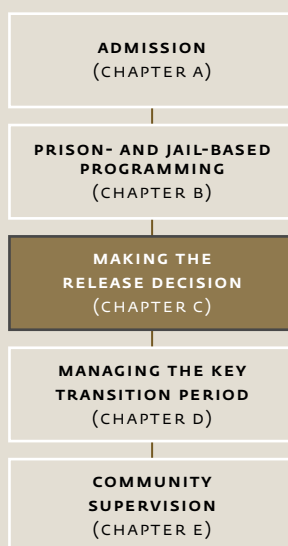
In some instances, work with community-based organizations may be assigned through a work-release program, where program participants actually leave the correctional facility during the work day. In most instances, however, work-release programming is limited to individuals who are close to their release date. (See Policy Statement 22, Workforce Development and the Transition Plan, for more on work release.)



CHAPTER C

*Making the  
Release Decision*

## THE RE-ENTRY PROCESS:



## The divergence

among state practices regarding release may be greater than it is at any other phase in the continuum from intake to re-entry, making it difficult to present generally applicable, consensus-based recommendations

about release processes. How can one compare the release decision making in Texas (a state with an appointed parole board that has authority over who is released on parole, conditions of supervision, and revocation) with that of Oklahoma (where the governor makes the decision to release based on information from the parole board) or Maine (where parole was abolished in 1976)? (See Appendix, “Chart of Status of Parole by State,” for a state-by-state guide to the discretion allotted to each state’s decision makers concerning release from incarceration.)

What is clear is that, at some point during nearly every person’s incarceration, he or she faces either the possibility of release, in states where there is discretion in the release decision; or the certainty of release, in states where sentencing laws require mandatory release after a period of incarceration. Whether the releasing authority—such as a parole board, commission, governor, or judge—has discretion both in making the release decision and setting or adjusting the conditions of release, or just in setting the conditions of release, it must have some basis for making its determinations. (See sidebar, “Community Supervision: A Concise Guide,” in Policy Statement 17, for further explanation of “releasing authority” and other terms related to community supervision.) No matter the exact

provisions of their charge, these decision makers need information about the progress, risks, needs, and strengths of each re-entering individual. Such information should guide decisions even when

there will be no period of supervised release after incarceration, and therefore no enforceable conditions of release. In these cases, corrections officials and community-based service providers seeking to interrupt the cycle of recidivism must still determine transitional programming for the final stage of a person’s incarceration and facilitate linkages between the person and community-based resources that he or she can pursue voluntarily after release.

This chapter explores the information-gathering and analysis that shape decisions made as a person draws near the point of release, as well as the process and steps involved in making the decisions themselves. Without equating the divergent systems in different states, the policy statements that follow seek to provide common lessons and make recommendations that are relevant to many different kinds of release systems. Where a principle or directive refers to one particular model, however, it has been noted in the text. In general, Policy Statement 17, Advising the Releasing Authority, addresses the period in which information and recommendations are collected and presented to the releasing authority. Policy Statement 18, Release Decision, focuses more on the period in which a release decision is made or a pre-established release date is imminent.