Preparing for Impactful
REENTRY PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

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LATINO
COALITION
FOR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP
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Introduction

Successful community reentry programs utilize community and faith-based organizations to support people returning from incarceration. These organizations implement a variety of programs, including mentoring, employment services, cognitive interventions, restorative justice and other social supports. Not all reentry practices have the same impact and research is divided on whether reentry programs ultimately impact recidivism. Understanding which services are providing the highest impact and return on investment can be a challenge, however a practice model is a tool to balance innovation with science to increase the impact of reentry programs.

For decades, research has focused on developing evidence-based practices to produce better outcomes for people. In recent years, it has become a standard of public policy and granting entities to require that programs adopt research driven approaches. While many improvements have been made, we are discovering that there remains a gap between what programs are intended to do and the outcomes they produce. No matter how strong the science behind the practice, people and communities cannot benefit from the intervention if it is not implemented as intended.

A practice model provides the framework for reentry organizations to innovate without losing an evidence-based foundation. It can help scale programs across communities, states and regions without compromising consistency and fidelity to the underlying principles which drive program outcomes.

Common Features of Impactful Programs

Reentry programs offer a wide array of services designed to promote successful reintegration into the community. While program components vary across agencies, the features of **effective** programs are strikingly similar. The following ten principles are critical to building strong, sustainable and effective reentry programs in our communities:[1]

1. COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Families and communities play an important role in the reentry and supervision of individuals involved in the justice system. Studies have consistently shown these relationships are more powerful than formal agents of control (e.g., probation, parole, law enforcement) in helping people under community supervision achieve and maintain behavior change[2]. Additional research shows that informal social bonds such as faith and community-based organizations, mentors and neighbors are the strongest predictor of whether a person will refrain from committing crime[3]. Ideally, this support should start prior to reentry or as soon as possible. Research has shown that the most important determinant of success in the first 30 days after release from jail or prison is family and community support[4]. Organizations that make community support a central part of programming, integrate the work they do into the fabric of their community and provide services that are inclusive of family and other support networks of their participants.

[1] Alliance for Criminal Justice Innovation, 2017
[2] Petersilia, 2003; Sampson, 1988; Gottfredson & Hirshi, 1990 as cited in Young, Taxman, & Byrne, 2002
[3] Petersilia 2003
[4] Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 1999

2. SUPPORTIVE ALLIANCE

Building and fostering a supportive alliance with participants should be the foundation of reentry programs. The research is clear that a supportive alliance, or meaningful relationship, between those providing reentry services in the community and those receiving services is vitally important to an individual's long term success, and far more important than the application of any specific theory, technique or model[5]. A supportive alliance is built on the quality of the relationship between an organization, its staff and those they serve. Organizations that achieve results, focus on building and deepening strengths while creating safe environments for growth and learning.

3. ASSESS NEEDS AND STRENGTHS

The use of assessments to target needs and build on strengths is a critical part of determining what services are provided to who and why. People are complex and change over time. By using assessments to guide service provision, you can help to tailor your work to the individuals you are working with. Those who are helping people reentering the community, should focus on specific needs in the areas of a person's mindset, impulse control and self-regulation, peer relationships, substance dependence, family relationships, employment habits and free time habits[6].

4. TARGET RESOURCES

Community-based organizations should develop highly individualized, specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time driven impact plans that address the unique needs and strengths of the people they serve. This plan should be based on assessed needs and strengths and drive program services and resource allocation.

5. MOTIVATIONAL MENTORING

Motivational mentoring is an overall approach to working with participants built on empathy, autonomy and partnership, that strengthens an individual's desire to pursue their own goals around their return to the community. Motivational mentoring is the way we blend skills, like motivational interviewing, into our day to day activities. Effective programs understand when, how and with whom to blend motivational techniques to build upon an individual's desire to change their life and stay focused on their goals[7].

[5] Lowenkamp, Holsinger, Robinson, & Cullen, 2012
[6] Andrews & Bonta, 2010
[7] Campbell & Dyck, 2014

6. BUILD NEW SKILLS

Every interaction in the community and with participants is an opportunity to positively shape behavior and response. Part of the learning process involves watching other people in action. This modeling of positive communication, problem solving and coping skills is an important part of helping others with the change process[8]. Staff must have tools such as cognitive interventions and skill building activities that they can use with participants to help them navigate difficult situations, practice new skills, and build on existing strengths.

7. REWARD POSITIVE BEHAVIOR

The research is clear, rewarding positive behavior is a more powerful change strategy than punishing negative behavior[9]. To have the most impact, target and reward those behaviors that you are working on with a participant and remember that incentives should be provided as soon after the desired behavior, as possible. Rewarding behavior does not have to be material or expensive, praise and acknowledgement go a long way.

8. MEASURE WHAT MATTERS

Accurate and detailed information about participant progress helps organizations understand whether their practices and programs are effective with the people they are serving. To do this, organizations need to measure both employee performance and participant changes. This ensures programs are doing the things that have the most impact, with every participant, over time[10].

9. DELIVER FEEDBACK

Staff and participants alike must know how they are doing, what's working and what is not. Taking the information collected through measurement of practices and providing it as feedback to staff and participants can be incredibly powerful. This is possible by creating a robust system of feedback that consistently delivers information on what is being measured back to participants, staff and stakeholders. This is most impactful when an organization creates a culture of learning, where feedback and coaching are a part of daily practice and considered just the way you do business[11].

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[8] Trotter, 2009
[9] Friedmann, Green, Taxman, Harrington, Rhodes, Katz, & Burdon, 2012
[10] Century, Rudnick, & Freeman, 2012
[11] Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, & Wallace, 2009

10. EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

To provide consistent positive outcomes over time, organizations must be focused on **how** they are implementing their reentry program and services in the community they serve[12]. From hiring the right people, to building a management team that supports coaching and feedback and using data to make decisions, the organizational leadership must be paying attention to the actual implementation of the program itself. Intentional implementation is most often the difference between organizations that flourish and those that fizzle.

Recommendations for Effective Implementation

THIRD PARTY INTERMEDIARY

Organizations such as the Latino Coalition for Community Leadership (LCCL) promote grass root service by providing community and faith based organizations with hands-on support, administrative oversight and technical assistance to build capacity. This work includes increasing access to public dollars and grants, data tracking, performance measurement, reporting and compliance monitoring, assistance with staff and leadership development, coordinating relationships between state and federal agencies and community partners, and growth management and succession planning for sustainability.

Unique to LCCL's approach is maintaining high performance standards, continuous improvement and smart growth without imposing a rigid top-down model which compromises community needs. For some community partners, LCCL helps set up entire business systems to ensure they avoid the difficulties that smaller and newer organizations may face including business management and payroll system issues and cash flow problems. The support of a third party intermediary such as the Latino Coalition for Community Leadership, can be the difference between long-term, sustainable efforts for community based reentry programs and those struggling to survive. Read more about LCCL's work in the Urban Institute's report **Investing Justice Resources to Address Community Needs**[13].

PRACTICE MODEL

When a new reentry program is implemented, everyone has the best of intentions. As an organization grows, it can be difficult to keep everyone committed to the mission and that can impact the quality of services provided. Designed to assist programs apply research into day to day practices and prevent drift, a practice model provides a roadmap to staff and administrators for actualizing their mission while ensuring the key components which produce positive outcomes are not lost.

TOOLS

Reentry programs should incorporate tools as a roadmap to help them understand where they are at and where they are going in three different areas.

- **Individual-**Tools such as the Individual Needs and Strengths Inventory (INSIT)[14] should be used to assess participants for individualized service delivery.

- **Program-** Fidelity tools should also be used to measure implementation to ensure that the program is running as intended and sustainable over the long term.

- **Organization-** Measurement tools should track program outcomes so that organizations can share their story with stakeholders, improve or strengthen areas when identifies, and justify funding in the future.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, TRAINING, AND COACHING

Skills learned in training do not always make it into practice. Just as teaching new skills to program participants requires rehearsal and feedback, staff need support and practice to bring the principles into their daily work. This can be achieved by implementing an on-going coaching model to build the capacity of individual staff and the organization after any training event.

LEARNING CULTURE

The process of incorporating feedback into daily practice is what makes an organization a learning organization. Feedback from tools such as the INSIT, provide new knowledge about the work we do and feedback to help participants, staff and organizations continuously improve. This feedback helps participants measure their progress toward goals. Tools, like the INSIT, with scoring rules, also provide feedback to support consensus on how to be consistent in service delivery between staff members. Feedback from the INSIT can also help organizations measure what they are doing so that they can continue to innovate and do more of what works to show results.

EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF EVIDENCE THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH

Action research provides an opportunity to bridge the practice to research gap. The body of evidence which informs practice could benefit from the study of innovations happening in the community setting. Evaluations of programs have not always considered the diversity, culture and lived experiences of those participating in and delivering programs. Researchers may not come from the communities they are evaluating and may initiate research questions, perform randomized control trials and collect data from outside the context of organizational culture and practice. By intentionally involving all levels of staff in posing research questions and collecting data from their daily work about what they consider important, communities can increase their learning from rapid improvement cycles and contribute to and amplify the body of evidence which informs practice.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Community reentry programs are an evidence based and cost-effective strategy to address the complex issues of criminal justice reform. Overusing incarceration has had a destabilizing effect on communities. Communities are safer when residents are engaged in the solution to these complex problems and can work together toward shared goals. Reforming justice practices requires multiple stakeholders, voices and perspectives, including and importantly, those with lived experience. The collective impact model can provide a useful framework for collaboration and data driven reentry programming where all partners have a common agenda for change including a shared understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions. The elements of the collective impact model include having a common agenda, establishing shared measures, engaging in mutually reinforcing activities, communicating continuously, and involving a third party intermediary.[15]

Implementation Leadership™

For decades researchers and practitioners have scratched their heads, wondering why innovative reentry efforts and programs that worked well in one area, or intuitively seemed like a magic bullet, failed to produce the outcomes everyone anticipated. What were we missing? Why were evidence-based programs not consistently producing good outcomes? It is only in the last decade or so that we have data showing that **how** a program is implemented plays a significant role in whether they will deliver desired outcomes and sustain that impact over time. There are **4 PILLARS** of effective implementation that are critical to the adoption, use and sustainment of reentry innovations: People, Leadership, Data, and Culture.[16]

**OUR IMPLEMENTATION LEADERSHIP CURRICULA HAS 10 PRINCIPLES:**

1. Trust the Vision
2. Murphy Hates Us
3. Be Comfortable Being Uncomfortable
4. Adapt or Die
5. Fail Forward, Fail Often
6. Culture is King
7. Lead the Hearts, Lead the Minds
8. Be Intentional
9. Take the Leap
10. Savor the Journey

To learn more or sign up for an upcoming training, to go our website: **www.acji.org**

[15] Kania, J. & Kramer, M. Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2011
[16] Alliance for Criminal Justice Innovation, 2018

4 PILLARS OF EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION™
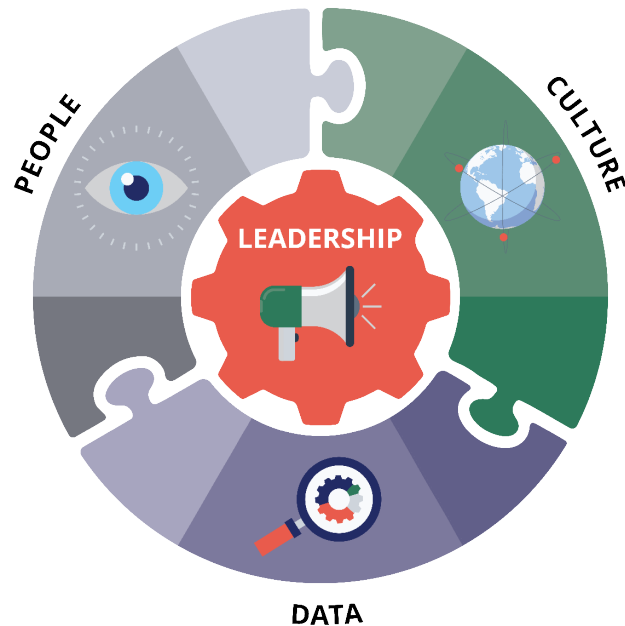
PEOPLE

- Who we hire, how we hire and how we train and coach our people are critical components for continued success. This is because things like staff attitudes and beliefs about reentry, their commitment to the organization's mission, and their knowledge and experience play a role in how an organization's services are experienced by participants.[17]

- Consistent ongoing coaching and feedback is the key to keeping staff skills sharp and on track. Without a coaching process which is part of daily work flow and supports staff to integrate new skills into the delivery of services, an organization may not know whether poor outcomes are a result of the program itself or how it is being delivered.[18]

LEADERSHIP

- Leadership is important in the adoption and implementation of a variety of innovations.[19] Leadership attitudes and strategies are often what make the difference in program performance, as leaders are responsible for the important decisions, resources, relationships and vision for implementation. Their focus can create a supportive environment for staff, remove barriers to implementing innovations, and impact a culture of feedback and process improvement which is important in creating a learning culture that supports intentional, systematic change. The leadership attitudes and strategies best aligned with implementing reentry programming and innovations can be found in the 10 Essential Principles of Implementation Leadership™ These principles were derived from practical experience and academic research related directly to the implementation and sustainment of reentry innovations.[20]

[17] Metz, Bandy, & Burkhauser, 2009
[18] Mowbray, Holter, Teague, & Bybee, 2003
[19] Aarons, 2006; Coronado, & Antony, 2002; Rogers, 1983
[20] Mathews, B. & Tapia, G, Alliance for Criminal Justice Innovation, 2016

DATA

- The implementation of innovative reentry programming requires the use of objective data to drive decisions about progress and quality. To be successful, programs must have the capacity to measure and track performance and outcomes to guide decisions about practices and programs. This process of using data to track process supports organizational engagement in the continuous quality improvement cycles necessary to successfully implement reentry innovations that work.

- This data can be used to make changes when necessary, to guide staff in their work, and to share with stakeholders and funders. Thus, it is critical that a data support system exists that captures meaningful and relevant data, provides the ability for that data to be analyzed in a meaningful way and can act as a support in guiding decisions about practices and programs as well as provide the means for meaningful feedback to be delivered to program staff.

CULTURE

- Culture can be defined as the process that allows individual beliefs and interaction to become collectively shared, ultimately forming an organizational culture. People use their unique mental models to process the world around them and build perspectives of their external environment[21]. However, in organizations these mental models can be shared among members regarding important organizational characteristics, practices, and processes. The nature of an organization's culture can help explain the collective values, beliefs, and assumptions organization members hold. The culture of an organization can be a powerful driver in its progress, or lack thereof. Organizations should encourage characteristics of culture such as flexibility, innovation, professional development, risk taking, and trust rather than focusing on process, bureaucracy, chain of command and control.

Conclusion

Innovations which will change the way we think about reentry are coming from communities most impacted by over incarceration and best positioned to provide programs that respond directly to the people they serve, in the context in which they live. Well planned and intentionally implemented reentry programs have an impact on individual lives and neighborhoods and are best positioned to impact broader criminal justice reform.

[21] Senge, 2006

For innovative programs to gain traction and funding, they must show outcomes. Having a strong foundation in research-based practices can help reentry programs do more than broker services and create lasting change in people's lives. Partnering with a third-party intermediary can bring your voice to vision by empowering your organization as it builds and grows. Tools like assessments and practice models can ensure programs are paying attention to implementation so they can do more of what works, less of what doesn't and more efficiently allocate resources to see long term positive impact in their community. Also, when community and faith-based organizations become learning organizations, and measure what they do, they can better leverage resources and funding, contribute to the body of research to advance new evidence-based practices, and tell the stories of the lives they are impacting in their communities.

RESOURCES FOR PREPARING FOR IMPACTFUL REENTRY PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

- **The Alliance for Criminal Justice Innovation www.acji.org**

  o Innovate for Impact: Integrative Practice Model™

  o Individual Needs and Strengths Identification Tool©

  o Implementation Leadership Academy™

- **The Latino Coalition for Community Leadership www.latinocoalition.org**

  o Funding

  o Technical assistance

  o Training

  o Capacity building