

## IMPACT FRAMEWORK

### A Template for Evaluating the Impact of Reentry Education Programs

## INTRODUCTION

Evaluation is a critical component of the [Reentry Education Framework](#) and most program providers are committed to [data collection and evaluation](#) that assess participant-level outcomes and overall program effectiveness. As providers start to develop their evaluation plans, it may be helpful to develop a broader framework to inform their understanding of the **impact** that their reentry program has on participants, the institution(s) providing program services, the public systems that provide services or funding, and even the level of community interest in and support for reentry services.

This template provides a framework for assessing impact by looking at an additional three components in addition to participant outcomes: awareness, knowledge, and behavior. Through these additional components, reentry education program providers and their partners can speak to a range of important contributions from work.

## COMPONENTS OF THE IMPACT FRAMEWORK

As mentioned above, the Impact Framework includes four components: (1) awareness, (2) knowledge, (3) behavior, and (4) population outcomes. Each component is described below

1. **AWARENESS** refers to the level of understanding and attention that the organization can foster or promote with respect to the **related challenges and potential solutions** of reentry education and necessary supports. For example, research shows that employment<sup>1</sup> and education<sup>2</sup> are pivotal factors for reducing the risk that individuals will commit more crimes. Building awareness of these facts and raising awareness about existing reentry education programs may also build support for and investments in programs that provide (and sustain) education, training, and necessary supports to help returning citizens earn the credentials they need to get jobs. Through activities

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<sup>1</sup> Finding that transitional jobs can reduce recidivism. <http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/CEO-PrisonerReentryReport.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Research finding that incarcerated individuals who participate in education are 43% less likely to return to prison than their peers who do not participate in education. [https://www.bja.gov/Publications/RAND\\_Correctional-Education-Meta-Analysis.pdf](https://www.bja.gov/Publications/RAND_Correctional-Education-Meta-Analysis.pdf)

that raise awareness, providers and partners can positively impact the public perception about people who have been incarcerated, and make relevant stakeholders aware of the positive contribution that these citizens can have in the community when there are investments in education and training programs that support them.

***Partners can consider the following as a way to determine the impact of their activities in raising awareness about reentry education:***

- As a result of the organization or partners' efforts to share information, does the public *have a better understanding* of the reentry population? Is there a better understanding of the value of reentry education and employment support for reentry? Are stakeholders, including returning citizens, more aware of existing reentry education programs in the community?

2. **KNOWLEDGE** refers to activities that **share research, information about model designs, and highlight promising practices** that deepen understanding of the issue of reentry education and proposed solutions for systems, programs, and services. For example, partners providing reentry education could share descriptions about their programs, data that shows program effectiveness, or reports of promising approaches for serving returning citizens.

***Partners can consider the following as a way to determine the impact of their activities in building knowledge about reentry education:***

- As a result of the information, research, etc., that you have developed and shared, what do your partners, other providers, our constituents, and/or local community influencers know now that they didn't know before (or might not have otherwise known how to do) with respect to reentry education programming or reentry supports?
- As a result of the information that you have shared about reentry education, what do your constituents, the reentry population, now know about these services and how to access services that they did not know of before (or might not have otherwise known how to do)?

3. **BEHAVIOR** refers to the **changes in practice and policy** that result directly from applying the knowledge shared about the reentry program models and frameworks or promising practices to the provider's program or context. For example, when reentry education begins in the corrections facilities it may be difficult to manage correction facility staff's willingness to accommodate classroom schedules, or they may be referring inmates to education programs more as a way to "keep them busy" than as a thoughtful match between the students' needs and program offerings and requirements. If the corrections staff changes practice and more thoughtfully refers inmates to education courses based on conversations and information that the provider shared with the corrections staff, that would constitute a change of behavior

under this framework. This may also provide a strategy to capture systems change as well.

***Partners can consider the following to determine the impact of their activities in changing behavior and practices in implementing reentry education models:***

- As a result of the information you share and the coaching / technical assistance you provide, how are our partners acting differently, in terms of implementing programs/approaches and changing policies to support the success of our target populations?
4. The **POPULATION outcomes** component, probably the most common, refers to the **impact on target populations** metrics, both qualitative and quantitative, such as enrollment, retention, attainment, or participants' changes in self-perception. The providers and partners can collect and share these metrics as evidence of other components.

## EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

There can be many sources of evidence to show an impact in the four components of the framework.

***Partners can consider the following as they evaluate their impact:***

- It can include simple changes in the awareness levels of an “issue” demonstrated by things that you can count, such as website hits and attendees at an event.
- Changes in behavior that you can observe like change in agency policy, organizational practices, or investments in new models.
- Direct impact, such as changes in individuals completing training, improvement of academics, increased acquisition of credentials, or reductions in the recidivism rates.
- Direct testimonials from people impacted by the reentry programs, like participants and staff, can be powerful evidence of awareness and behavior change.
- Third-party evaluations or case studies that examine outcomes for individuals and organizations.
- Survey research on participants' self-perception can provide qualitative evidence of success.

While considering sources of evidence, providers and partners should also consider the cost of the evaluation or data collection to ensure it is feasible and also is a good “bang for the evaluation buck.”

***Partners can consider the following to determine relative costs for the evaluation in terms of low, moderate, and high:***

- **Low** is when the effort has minimal cost to obtain basic information that is part of the staff's existing work and practices, such as distributing a SurveyMonkey survey, tracking web hits, or looking at data that is already regularly collected, like intake assessments or exit interviews.
- **Moderate** is when the efforts require additional resources, such as staff time to create and analyze a survey or additional information from partners.
- **High** is when the efforts require significant additional resources, such as the hiring of a third-party evaluator to perform an impact evaluation, or the investment of significant staff time to collect new data and create new databases.

# IMPACT FRAMEWORK TEMPLATE

You can use this template to consider the impact of your program across the four components. This template can be developed in partnership with program partners to capture the full range of activities and evidence of impact.

	Activities/Efforts	Evidence	Cost of Evaluation
Awareness			
Knowledge			
Behavior			
Population Outcomes			