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**MODELING FOR SUCCESS:
STRENGTHENING HOMELAND SECURITY THROUGH
VOCATIONAL-BASED OFFENDER PROGRAMMING**

by

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September 2020

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THROUGH VOCATIONAL-BASED OFFENDER PROGRAMMING**

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ABSTRACT

Incarceration rates in the United States are among some of the highest in the world, and offenders' returning to confinement is an issue that needs reform. Correctional agencies need to identify programs to prepare offenders for a better chance at a successful reintegration into society. While many methods attempt to reduce recidivism, research shows that unemployed offenders are overwhelmingly more likely to return to prison than offenders who obtain stable, living-wage jobs with advancement opportunities. This thesis investigated vocational-based programs for offenders to identify best practices and potential gaps, as well as program components that support offender success through job skill training. The research methodology consisted of a literature review, qualitative analysis, and a local case study of the Michigan Department of Corrections' Vocational Village program. Because the research uncovered very little information and data for vocational-based training for offenders, this thesis attempted to fill that gap by constructing a conceptual model for vocational program development that starts with a mission statement and ends with continuous program improvement. Using the information contained within this thesis, agencies might construct a tailored model or framework for instituting a vocational-based program.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BJS	Bureau of Justice Statistics
CAL FIRE	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
CDCR	California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
DTE	Detroit Edison (Utilities)
GED	general education diploma
ILT	instructor-led training
MDOC	Michigan Department of Corrections
MOOC	massive open online course
NCCER	National Center for Construction Education and Research
SA	South Australia(n)
SMART	specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound
SSDI	Social Security disability insurance
SSI	Social Security insurance
VET	vocational and education training

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States incarcerates more people than any other country in the world, with a prison population of more than two million. The majority of offenders are released back into the communities after serving their time, but unfortunately, an average of over 40 percent of offenders will return to confinement.¹

The loss of one's freedom does not always deter criminal acts even after incarceration, as evidenced by the rate of recidivism in the United States. While imprisonment serves as a form of punishment, correctional agencies should also consider rehabilitative efforts to reduce recidivism. Additionally, reducing recidivism will enhance public safety, improve societal relationships of offenders and their families, and reduce the enormous cost generated by criminal acts and incarceration.

Offenders who do not secure employment are overwhelmingly more likely to return to prison than offenders who obtain a stable, living wage and opportunity for advancement.² Working against those released from prison is the unemployment rate for offenders, which is estimated to be five times higher than the national unemployment rate.³

Some offenders enter prison with a high school diploma or general education diploma (GED), and most will leave with a GED if they did not have one. However, they may still lack the skills or credentials to obtain and keep good jobs after release. This study builds on previous analyses of correctional agencies that provide offenders with the training and skills needed to obtain employment to improve the chances of offender success and reduce recidivism.

¹ Mariel Alper, Matthew R. Durose, and Joshua Markman, *2018 Update on Prisoner Recidivism: A 9-Year Follow-up Period (2005-2014)* (Washington, DC: Department of Justice, 2018), <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/18upr9yfup0514.pdf>.

² John Rakis, "Improving the Employment Rates of Ex-Prisoners Under Parole," *Federal Probation* 69, no. 1 (June 2005): 12–22.

³ Lucius Couloute and Daniel Kopf, *Out of Prison & Out of Work: Unemployment among Formerly Incarcerated People* (Northampton, MA: Prison Policy Initiative, July 2018), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>.

The Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC), like many other correctional agencies, is implementing programs to better prepare offenders for release. These “reentry” programs focus on providing the offender with a pathway from one’s first day of incarceration. The programs are designed for each offender to complete courses in primary education, substance abuse, cognitive thinking, career counseling, parenting, employment readiness, budget management, and the means to secure vital documents. MDOC understands the importance of offender success and how post-release employment affects recidivism and public safety.

MDOC has implemented the Vocational Village pilot program, a “first-of-its-kind skilled trades training program that aims to provide a positive learning community for prisoners who are serious about completing career and technical education.”⁴ The Village is part of a holistic approach that incorporates skilled-trade training, teaches effective communication, integrates soft skills, and provides credentialing for offenders completing coursework.

The program is piloting at two MDOC sites, where offenders participating in the program live in the same housing unit and have a structured schedule resembling a typical workday and workweek. Offenders coordinate with employment counselors to select from available courses for jobs that are currently in demand in Michigan. The environment encourages peer support among offenders and staff, resulting in a therapeutic environment that helps offenders to increase their chance of success after release.

The thesis had three goals: to evaluate vocational-based offender programs, to identify components for program implementation, and to create a conceptual model. Methodologies for research consisted of a literature review, qualitative assessment, and local knowledge case study of MDOC’s Vocational Village program. This thesis examined the components of the Village and other vocational-based training programs for offenders as well as recommendations to enhance current programs. A review of evaluated practices and recommendations provided a road map for correctional agencies considering the

⁴ “Vocational Village,” Michigan Department of Corrections, accessed October 27, 2019, https://www.michigan.gov/corrections/0,4551,7-119-33218_75514---,00.html.

implementation of similar programs designed to strengthen offender success through skills training and employment.

Using the information and conceptual model contained in this thesis, agencies might construct their own framework for instituting a vocational-based program. That information includes program considerations, from evaluating in-demand jobs to developing programs; physical plant needs; technology and classroom instruction; employment readiness; resource considerations; and supervision after release from confinement.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The United States incarcerates more people than any other country in the world. With an offender population of more than two million, there are approximately 640,000 offenders released into U.S. communities after their prison sentences each year, whether they are prepared for reintegration or not.¹

Because offenders might not be ready for this transition, rehabilitation—not just incarceration—needs to be considered by criminal justice agencies before releasing them from prison or jail. As incarceration serves as a form of punishment, rehabilitation should instill a moral obligation with society to provide an avenue for offenders to become better and more productive members of their communities, to salvage and improve their personal relationships, and to help others as others have helped them. Peter Raynor and Gwen Robinson support this idea: “Offenders need communities, and communities need rehabilitated offenders: rehabilitation is enjoined on society not simply by their needs or deficits, but by their strengths, assets, and potential contribution.”²

Aside from tremendous benefits to communities receiving rehabilitated offenders, public safety and the cost of incarceration should also drive agencies to explore policies and programs to reduce recidivism. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) under the U.S. Department of Justice, the 2015 annual costs of federal, state, and local incarceration in the United States were nearly \$87 billion.³ These costs do not include federal, state, and local policing nor the costs associated with the judicial functions of criminal proceedings.

Programs delivered to offenders during incarceration can have a positive psychological impact on the success of those released from confinement and should

¹ “Prisoners and Prisoner Re-Entry,” Department of Justice, accessed October 4, 2019, https://www.justice.gov/archive/fbci/progmenu_reentry.html.

² Peter Raynor and Gwen Robinson, “Why Help Offenders? Arguments for Rehabilitation as a Penal Strategy,” *European Journal of Probation* 1, no. 1 (March 2009): 3–20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/206622030900100102>.

³ Tracey Kyckelhahn, “Justice Expenditure and Employment Extracts, 2012 – Preliminary,” Bureau of Justice Statistics, February 26, 2015, <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=5239>.

encourage policymakers to develop, implement, and support rehabilitation and the transition to release.

A study of prisoner recidivism rates from 2005 to 2014 indicates 68 percent of offenders find themselves under arrest within the first three years, 79 percent within six, and 83 percent within nine years after release from prison.⁴ An offender has many obstacles to overcome upon release from prison, one of which is securing stable employment. For offenders on parole, the inability to gain employment may send them back to prison for failing to follow the conditions of parole, or they may resort to criminal activity to afford housing, clothing, or food.

Although ex-felons may be seeking employment, the unemployment rate of previously incarcerated individuals is estimated to be five times higher than the U.S. unemployment rate, higher even than the unemployment rate during the Great Depression.⁵ A study conducted by the U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services system indicates that unemployed ex-offenders return to prison at a rate 500 times higher than ex-offenders who are employed.⁶ The percentage of unemployed ex-offenders after release should be on the radar of correctional homeland security policymakers, as there have been bipartisan calls for prison and rehabilitation reforms.⁷

The local job market, as well as the types of jobs available, may be limited in the areas where ex-offenders are returning as citizens to seek employment. Mobility of offenders without personal transportation, access to public transit, or alternate means of getting to work may be limited; hence, local employment options may be more appropriate for offenders. Therefore, it is critical to offender success that this population obtains

⁴ Mariel Alper, Matthew R. Durose, and Joshua Markman, *2018 Update on Prisoner Recidivism: A 9-Year Follow-up Period (2005-2014)* (Washington, DC: Department of Justice, 2018), <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/18upr9yfup0514.pdf>.

⁵ Lucius Couloute and Daniel Kopf, *Out of Prison & Out of Work: Unemployment among Formerly Incarcerated People* (Northampton, MA: Prison Policy Initiative, July 2018), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>.

⁶ John Rakis, "Improving the Employment Rates of Ex-Prisoners Under Parole," *Federal Probation* 69, no. 1 (June 2005): 12, https://www.uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/fed_probation_june_2005.pdf.

⁷ "Bipartisan Support for Criminal Justice Reform Still Strong," Equal Justice Initiative, accessed October 5, 2019, <https://eji.org/news/bipartisan-support-criminal-justice-reform-still-strong>.

training and job skills that are not only in demand nationally but also in sought-after positions for the geographic areas of their release. Additionally, if offenders are not equipped with the knowledge to compete for the in-demand jobs, any training would be futile. Offender success may be compromised if unemployment rates are higher and fewer jobs are available where they are released.

Assuming that offender success depends on obtaining gainful employment upon release, offenders may benefit from choosing a training program that best suits them. Offenders may possess various skill sets before being sentenced to confinement that they can enhance through furthering education or learning a trade. Equally, prisoners may benefit from the feeling of self-investment and the choice to capitalize on their interests and skills when participating in employment readiness training while incarcerated. Offenders may be more likely to engage in education and job skills training when they are actively participating and deciding their future.

While most offenders leave prison with a general education diploma, the majority of them still typically lack the skills to get and keep a “good” job that provides stability, a livable wage, and an opportunity for advancement. Programs offering vocational training can bolster offender success for good-paying jobs as skilled trades are in demand across the United States.⁸ Offenders can learn a skilled trade much faster than an advanced degree while developing the skills needed to obtain employment upon release, thereby improving their chances of success.

There are approximately 1,800 state prisons and 110 federal prisons in the United States.⁹ Studies conducted by the RAND Corporation highlight the importance of reducing recidivism through vocational-based job training and placement for offenders.¹⁰ Federal and state-level corrections officials understand the importance of such studies and are

⁸ Elise A. Couston, “The U.S. Labor Shortage: Is It Real or Economic Semantics?,” REJournals, March 25, 2019, <https://www.rejournals.com/the-u-s-labor-shortage-is-it-real-or-economic-semantics-20190325.aspx>.

⁹ Wendy Sawyer and Peter Wagner, *Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2020* (Northampton, MA: Prison Policy Initiative, March 24, 2020), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2020.html>.

¹⁰ “Education and Vocational Training in Prisons Reduces Recidivism, Improves Job Outlook,” RAND Corporation, August 22, 2013, <https://www.rand.org/news/press/2013/08/22.html>.

interested in proposing this type of program but may lack the resources to do so. What is needed is a set of universal program components and a framework for implementation. Without a standardized program model or curriculum, correctional agencies will need to start from scratch, which may delay or deter a state or a corrections system from standing up a vocational training program.

In 2015, Heidi Washington became director of the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC). One of Director Washington's priorities was to develop a vocational-based program for offenders. The education administrator was directed to submit a proposal for implementation but was unable to locate any material or guidance on which to model a program. The lack of information pushed MDOC to start developing its skilled-trade program curriculum without external guidance. The first MDOC pilot came to fruition in 2016. Since 2016, MDOC has learned that there is a continuous process of building skilled-trade programs. Ever-changing job markets, resources, budgets, candidate pools, and stakeholder partnerships need regular review for successful program operations.

An examination of the MDOC Vocational Village's current practice may help the department and other agencies identify a method or model for recognizing offenders most likely to succeed before classroom instruction by evaluating their social and cognitive skills. Furthermore, coaching an offender from program selection to release from agency jurisdiction should provide an enhanced measure of success.

The research recommendations may help guide an agency to evaluate the desired skilled trades needed for job placement, collaborate with non-governmental organizations for employment opportunities, and consider presentation methods for delivering information to offenders. Each positive outcome will enhance the safety and security of citizens, reduce taxpayer dollars dedicated to incarceration, and strengthen infrastructure and resiliency in homeland security. Other local, state, and federal programs could benefit from research and recommendations for vocational-based program implementation. The bottom line is that offenders are returning to our communities, and preparing them to succeed creates a situation where everyone wins. Vocational-based programs can be part of the solution.

A. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores existing interpretations and definitions of recidivism as it relates to the discipline of criminal justice, precisely focused on incarcerated adult offenders. Additionally, the literature review examines some causes of recidivism and the effects of incarcerated offender programs designed to reduce recidivism.

1. Defining Recidivism

Recidivism has become a measure for criminal justice agencies, policy- and decision-makers, and lawmakers when determining the success and failure of programs designed to reduce the population of incarcerated offenders. The use of recidivism as a goal and measure may bolster an agency's proposal to support a program that is heading in the right direction.

The definitions of recidivism vary, which could affect the way an agency measures and defines performance outcomes compared to other correctional programs. According to Jerome H. Begun, until the criminal justice discipline can decide on a standardized, consistent, or shared definition of recidivism, it will misrepresent or interpret the meaning from an individual perspective.¹¹ Begun's claim is further supported by the BJS, which indicates "there is no single definition of recidivism."¹²

The National Institute of Justice "refers to recidivism as a person's relapse into criminal behavior, often after the person receives sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime" as the foundational definition.¹³ Although the definition of recidivism differs from one source to the next, most interpretations include the three following components:

¹¹ Jerome H. Begun, "Recidivism," *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 22, no. 4 (December 1976): 296–303, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002076407602200408>.

¹² "The Measures of Recidivism," Bureau of Justice Statistics, accessed November 7, 2019, <https://www.bjs.gov/recidivism/templates/definition.cfm>.

¹³ "Recidivism," National Institute of Justice, June 17, 2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160120175242/http://www.nij.gov/topics/corrections/recidivism/pages/welcome.aspx>.

1. Custodial confinement or sanctions for a criminal act;
2. A specified timeframe for reoffending or returning to confinement; and
3. An act warranting a return to confinement or sanction.

Custody can imply various levels of confinement or sanctions such as incarceration in state or federal facilities or local jails, parole, probation, electronic monitoring, or alternatives to physical captivity. Next, timeframes vary based on the objective of measurement and a reasonableness standard of historical data. Finally, an offender commits a criminal act resulting in a return to custody. For example, in its public safety realignment plan, Los Angeles County, California, defines recidivism as “a qualifying return to custody during a specified time period.”¹⁴ The plan includes the basic three components of establishing recidivism:

1. Custody: Jail, prison, and electronic monitoring.
2. Timeframe: Three years after release from custody.
3. Criminal Acts: Misdemeanor and felony arrests, convictions, incarcerations, and violations of sanctions that impose additional penalties or a return to confinement.¹⁵

The literature indicates that the main components of recidivism tend to be determined by those who apply it as a measure of effectiveness when establishing criteria for desired performance outcomes.¹⁶

¹⁴ Los Angeles County Public Safety Realignment Team, *Public Safety Realignment: Year-Two Report* (Los Angeles: Public Safety Realignment Team, 2013), http://ccjcc.lacounty.gov/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=GZ99E_1joHk%3d&portalid=11.

¹⁵ Los Angeles County Public Safety Realignment Team.

¹⁶ Kim Steven Hunt, Robert Dunville, and Robert Dumville, *Recidivism among Federal Offenders: A Comprehensive Overview* (Washington, DC: United States Sentencing Commission, 2016), 61, https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/research-publications/2016/recidivism_overview.pdf.

2. Causes of Recidivism

Offenders released from custody, as previously defined, face many challenges. Developing and evaluating a program's success requires an understanding of the difficulties that may affect the program's measure of success. A study conducted by Beth Huebner and Mark Berg on the sources of recidivism revealed several reasons for reoffense:

1. On the one hand, one of the most common attributes of recidivism is the age of the offender; the younger the offender, the higher the probability of relapse.
2. On the other hand, aging offenders—often described as “aging out of crime”—are less likely to return to custody.¹⁷ In *The Age and Crime Relationship*, Ulmer and Steffensmeier explain, “The social structuring of age-graded roles, opportunities, and resources strongly shapes the age patterning of crime. Aging is a biological process, to be sure, but the life course is a key part of social structure. The life course structures and is structured by society. And crime is an important component of the social structure of aging and the life course.”¹⁸
3. Stability in relationships of loved ones also contributes to a reduction in recidivism, suggesting offenders returning to an environment with the support of family and friends are more likely to succeed.
4. Robust relationships may improve an offender's ability to secure a place to reside and care for oneself as well as deter behaviors or associations with social groups involved in nefarious activities.¹⁹

¹⁷ Beth M. Huebner and Mark T. Berg, “Examining the Sources of Variation in Risk for Recidivism,” *Justice Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (February 2011): 146–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418820903365213>.

¹⁸ Jeffery T. Ulmer and Darrell Steffensmeier, “The Age and Crime Relationship: Social Variation, Social Explanations,” in *The Nurture versus Biosocial Debate in Criminology: On the Origins of Criminal Behavior and Criminality*, by Kevin Beaver, J. C. Barnes, and Brian Boutwell (London: SAGE Publications, 2014), 394, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483349114.n24>.

¹⁹ Huebner and Berg, “Sources of Variation in Risk for Recidivism,” 146–73.

5. Another contributing factor in transitioning to society from confinement involves obtaining the essentials of living (e.g., housing, food, water, and hygiene); without them, offenders may resort to criminal activity to provide for their basic human needs. Offenders may also resort to illegal activity as a result of desiring a lifestyle similar to what they had before arrest and conviction.

Beyond stable relationships and living conditions, offenders must overcome individual challenges such as substance abuse, health or mental illness, and criminal history. For example, a 2008 study from the Urban Institute by Kamala Mallik-Kane and Christy A. Visher produced some key findings: over 80 percent of offenders returning to custody experienced mental illness, physical health conditions, or substance abuse. While most offenders participated in group therapy sessions for substance abuse while incarcerated, fewer than 25 percent continued to attend once released.²⁰ In addition to individual challenges, there are gender-related challenges for men as they are more likely to reoffend than women. A BJS report from May 2018 indicates that 45 percent of male prisoners are arrested within the first year of release from confinement compared to 35 percent of female prisoners.²¹ Additionally, Mallik-Kane and Visher’s research concludes most offenders experience a combination of conditions that are neither diagnosed nor treated as most lack health insurance to seek treatment, resulting in hospitalization and emergency room admissions.²² The criminal history of offenders—both the frequency and seriousness of crimes—is a predictor of recidivism. According to the United States Sentencing Commission, offenders with more violent and substantial criminal histories are more likely to commit criminal offenses after release from custody than offenders with minimal and less-violent crimes.²³

²⁰ Kamala Mallik-Kane and Christy A. Visher, *Health and Prisoner Reentry: How Physical, Mental, and Substance Abuse Conditions Shape the Process of Reintegration* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1037/e719772011-001>.

²¹ Alper, Durose, and Markman, *2018 Update*, 24.

²² Mallik-Kane and Visher, *Health and Prisoner Reentry*, 2.

²³ Tracey Kyckelhahn and Trishia Cooper, *The Past Predicts the Future: Criminal History and Recidivism of Federal Offenders* (Washington, DC: United States Sentencing Commission, 2017), <https://www.ussc.gov/research/research-reports/criminal-history-and-recidivism-federal-offenders>.

While many factors contribute to recidivism, the literature suggests that race, education, and employment are also influential in predicting relapse. The disproportionate number of minorities sentenced to prison compared to white offenders is shrinking, according to John Gramlich of the Pew Research Center. Nevertheless, blacks and Hispanics are sent to prison nearly twice as often as whites.²⁴ For example, in a North Carolina state prison study conducted by Florida State University, the University of Iowa, and the University of Connecticut, minority males return to prison 58 percent of the time compared to “fewer than half of white men and women released during the same time frame.”²⁵ Also, the race of an offender plays a significant role in post-release employment opportunities, as indicated by Devah Pager: “The fact that blacks and ex-offenders were one-half to one-third as likely to be considered for entry-level job openings implies that their search process will on average take two to three times the amount of time spent by whites or those without criminal records.”²⁶ Moreover, criminal convictions can result in stigmatization and diminished interpersonal skills. Frustration, low self-esteem, anger, hopelessness, and the fear of judgment ultimately contribute to difficulty with securing and maintaining employment, being accepted within social networks, and communicating with others.

Pager contends employers are less likely to employ people with little work experience or long periods of unemployment in their job histories. Employers are also reluctant to allow ex-offenders access to anything of value, and unfortunately, no current mechanism exists to help ex-offenders remove the proverbial mark placed on them as a result of their crimes, regardless of the level of rehabilitation.²⁷ Employment is an essential factor in determining the success of an ex-offender and “appears to be a turning point in

²⁴ John Gramlich, “The Gap between the Number of Blacks and Whites in Prison Is Shrinking,” *Fact Tank* (blog), April 30, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/30/shrinking-gap-between-number-of-blacks-and-whites-in-prison/>.

²⁵ Crime and Justice Research Alliance, “Black Men Have Higher Rates of Recidivism Despite Lower Risk Factors: Study,” Science X Network, October 23, 2018, <https://phys.org/news/2018-10-black-men-higher-recidivism-factors.html>.

²⁶ Devah Pager, *Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), ProQuest.

²⁷ Pager, 152–53.

the life course of criminal offenders,” according to Christopher Uggen.²⁸ He adds that offenders “provided even marginal employment opportunities are less likely to re-offend than those not provided such opportunities.”²⁹ The literature indicates that helping those previously incarcerated search for, secure, and maintain employment will reduce the number of criminal reoffenses and returns to confinement.

3. Programs Affecting Recidivism

Bouffard, MacKenzie, and Hickman evaluated education and vocational training as they relate to employment and recidivism rates.³⁰ Their report highlights the importance and return on investment of prison education and vocational programs as they reduce the cost of imprisonment. RAND’s research indicates that inmates participating in educational programs “have 43 percent lower odds of returning to prison than those who do not . . . [and] those who participated in vocational training were 28 percent more likely to be employed after release than those who did not receive such training.”³¹ The return on investment of educational and vocational programs is three to four dollars for every dollar spent.³² Primary education is essential for individuals to function in society. Skills such as the ability to read and write may dictate the outcome of obtaining a job, securing housing, applying for credentials and assistance, and understanding directions. The importance of education and prison programs cannot be understated; the lack of education is a significant contributor to offenders returning to custody.

Many correctional facilities have or are in the process of implementing programs to better prepare offenders for release. These “reentry” programs focus on providing the offender with a pathway from one’s first day of incarceration. The programs are designed

²⁸ Christopher Uggen, “Work as a Turning Point in the Life Course of Criminals: A Duration Model of Age, Employment, and Recidivism,” *American Sociological Review* 65, no. 4 (August 2000): 529–46.

²⁹ Uggen, 529.

³⁰ Jeffrey A. Bouffard, Doris Layton MacKenzie, and Laura J. Hickman, “Effectiveness of Vocational Education and Employment Programs for Adult Offenders: A Methodology-Based Analysis of the Literature,” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 31, no. 1/2 (July 2000): 1, https://doi.org/10.1300/J076v31n01_01.

³¹ RAND Corporation, “Training in Prisons Reduces Recidivism.”

³² Bouffard, MacKenzie, and Hickman, “Effectiveness of Vocational Education and Employment.”

for each offender to complete courses in primary education, substance abuse, cognitive thinking skills, career counseling, parenting, employment readiness, budget management, and the means to secure vital documents.³³

Other programs attempt to reduce the stigma attached to criminal history and remove some of the barriers associated with obtaining employment. Ban the Box, an initiative to eliminate the collection of criminal history during an application process or interview for employment, may help reduce the bias of an employer against ex-offenders. Although it is not an official government policy, many agencies, such as the NAACP, endorse the initiative as they believe that employment will improve the quality of life for people with a criminal history.³⁴ Future research may be needed to evaluate the effectiveness of Ban the Box and similar initiatives, but some evidence suggests that the initiative may be having a negative effect.³⁵

B. RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the essential components to develop a model for a correctional vocational-based program that may reduce recidivism after an offender's release from confinement?

C. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis had three goals: to evaluate vocational-based offender programs, to identify components for program implementation, and to create a conceptual model. The results could help agencies at all levels of government determine whether vocational-based programs might be beneficial and provide guidance for implementation.

The methodology for this thesis used a qualitative assessment and local knowledge case study to determine the necessary components to produce a preliminary conceptual model for offender vocational-based programming. The qualitative research consisted of a

³³ "Prisoner Programming," Michigan Department of Corrections, accessed November 10, 2019, https://www.michigan.gov/corrections/0,4551,7-119-33218_68926---,00.html.

³⁴ "Ban the Box," National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.naacp.org/campaigns/ban-the-box/>.

³⁵ Casey Leins, "More Data Needed to Determine Whether 'Ban the Box' Laws Work," *U.S. News & World Report*, September 10, 2019, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/2019-09-10/ban-the-box-laws-could-negatively-impact-minorities>.

literature review and discussions with academic and vocational instructors, program administrators, and stakeholders within MDOC's offender success unit. Because no standardized program framework was available, the amount of data obtainable, as well as the ability to validate the data, was limited. The collection and review of press reports, published government documents, and academic studies provided qualitative data. The information and data collected produced commonalities in program effectiveness and usefulness that enhanced the findings and recommendations for a program framework.

I completed a comprehensive local case study of MDOC's Vocational Village to illustrate the processes, best practices, benefits, and challenges of the program. I have first-hand knowledge of the program from an internal perspective as an employee of MDOC and have incorporated information from agency colleagues assigned to Vocational Village. The objective was to study components of the program and assess the effectiveness as well as identify gaps to present an introductory program model. Specifically, the case study examined several areas:

- How does the program ensure the targeting and placing of offenders with the highest likelihood of success?
- What documented best practices does the program provide, and why are they considered best practices?
- Who are the beneficiaries of the program?
- What are the process challenges of the program?
- How does the program measure effectiveness?
- What facets of the program can be generalized for use by other agencies?
- What are the return-on-investment expectations?

Currently, there are no universal process models to guide agencies with interest in vocational-based program implementation. The program evaluation data were compared to similar vocational-based programs to identify beneficial and effective practices or processes that might support offender success through vocational training. Through this research, a conceptual business process model emerged to define a useful path for both offenders and agencies participating in vocational programs. The model begins with the

program's mission and values and transitions through post-release employment and continuous process improvement. The model provides a visual representation of program steps and expectations for criminal justice agencies.

As previously stated, limited data were available to determine program effectiveness; therefore, some outcomes might be theoretical. Future research will be needed to test actual findings.

D. CHAPTER OUTLINE

There are six additional chapters in this thesis. Chapter II provides an overview of vocational training and the current need for skilled-trade workers in the United States. Vocational-based offender programs from Australia, Norway, and the United States—specifically in Michigan—are discussed.

Chapter III focuses on the local knowledge case study of MDOC's Vocational Village program. Included in the chapter are program definitions, data analysis, program metrics, and performance measures. The chapter ends with a discussion on the potential return on investment.

Chapter IV discusses program considerations, beginning with the potential cultural shift among staff and stakeholders to enhance offender programming. The selection of staff to train and mentor program participants, as well as a proposed process for candidate screening and selection, is covered in the chapter. The chapter finishes with classroom and program delivery considerations, including the use of technology for content delivery, security considerations, and resource needs.

Chapter V introduces the importance of external stakeholder support for vocational-based training. Establishing partnerships with licensing agencies for credentials and vital documents to prepare offenders for release is discussed. The chapter ends by examining the need for potential employers, businesses, and public organizations to work collaboratively to employ, support, and assist offenders once released.

Finally, Chapter VI concludes the thesis with an introduction to the resulting conceptual model and discusses the research findings and limitations, as well as recommendations for future research.

II. VOCATIONAL-BASED PROGRAMS FOR OFFENDERS

This chapter examines the use of vocational-based programs for offenders sentenced to confinement within a local, state, or federal correctional facility, and the potential challenges associated with vocational program implementation.

A. VOCATIONAL TRAINING

The goal of an offender success program is one that creates an encouraging learning environment for offenders to acquire skills necessary to reduce the chance they will commit another crime and return to prison. There are many reasons some offenders successfully reintegrate into society while others do not. Nevertheless, vocational training is showing promise for successful reentry. In examining U.S. education and vocational training for inmates, the RAND Corporation has reported, “Prison inmates who receive general education and vocational training are significantly less likely to return to prison after release and are more likely to find employment than peers who do not receive such opportunities.”³⁶ For this reason, it is essential to understand how educational and vocational programs contribute to offender success, so an agency might garner support for developing vocational programs. Furthermore, because program implementation has significant investment costs—and taxpayer dollars will support programming—evidence-based success is preferred before, during, and after deployment.

This chapter examines vocational programs and the ways in which vocational training of offenders supports the in-demand jobs of skilled trades in the United States. A comparative analysis of Australia’s and Norway’s vocational programs highlights program development and processes as well as provides a baseline for correctional vocational programs currently in operation. The chapter concludes with challenges associated with vocational program design, development, implementation, and operation. Discussion includes agency considerations for vocational training within a secure environment, including infrastructure, human resources, and equipment acquisition.

³⁶ RAND Corporation, “Training in Prisons Reduces Recidivism.”

B. SKILLED TRADES NEED VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS

As more and more high school graduates are encouraged to attend college after high school, there has been a steadily increasing demand for skilled trade workers in the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in a 17-year period ending in 2017, college enrollment increased from 5 percent to 40 percent of the college-aged population (see Figure 1).³⁷ There may be a reason that high school students choose college over skilled trades. The 2017 International Student Survey indicates that over 25 percent of students attend college as they believe it is the “natural progression after high school” or because it is “expected of them.”³⁸ The trend of choosing college over vocational training may be contributing to skilled-trade job vacancies.

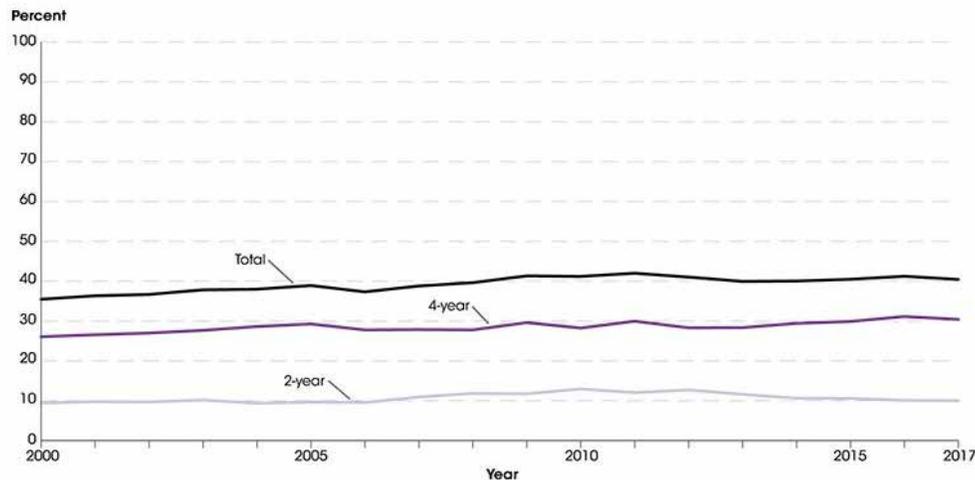


Figure 1. College Enrollment Rates of 18- to 24-Year-Olds by Level of Institution, 2000–2017³⁹

³⁷ “College Enrollment Rates,” National Center for Education Statistics, last updated May 2020, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cpb.asp.

³⁸ Seeta Bhardwa, “Why Do Students Go to University and How Do They Choose Which One?,” *Times Higher Education*, June 6, 2017, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/news/why-do-students-go-university-and-how-do-they-choose-which-one>.

³⁹ Source: National Center for Education Statistics, “College Enrollment Rates.”

Regardless of the trends for attending college, skilled-trade jobs are currently in demand and projected to continue (see Figure 2).⁴⁰

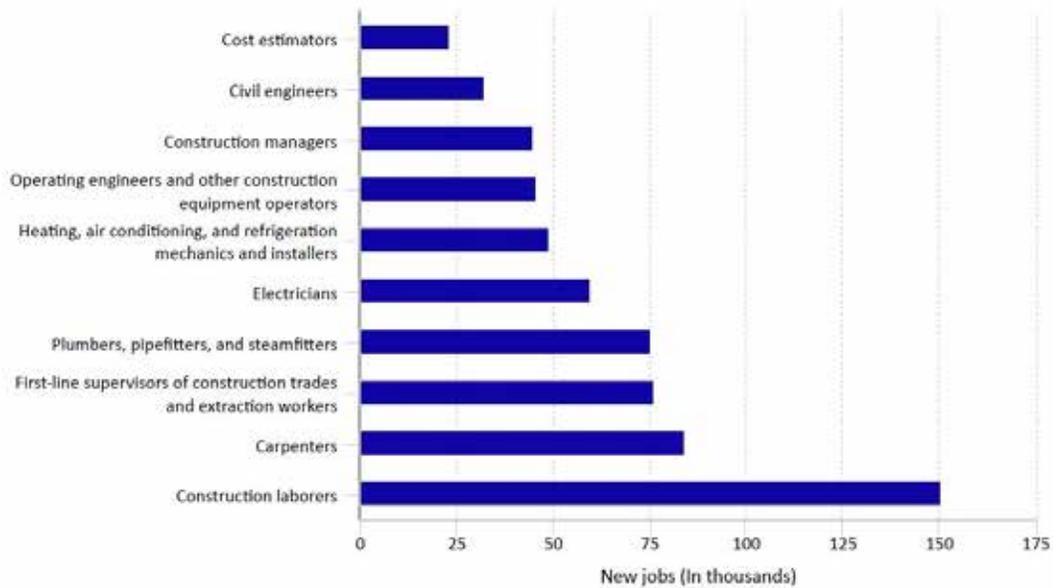


Figure 2. Increasing Demand for Infrastructure-Related Occupations, Projected 2016–2026⁴¹

Sustainable wages and the current and projected demand for specialized labor lend support to providing offenders with vocational training. Offenders who participate in skilled-trade programs, as opposed to secondary education completion, are more likely to obtain immediate employment after release from confinement. For example, in Michigan, when skilled and manufacturing jobs were in high demand in 2018, then-Governor Rick Snyder introduced the Marshall Plan for Talent initiative to prepare the workforce for employment.⁴² Graduates of trade or vocational programs could earn wages comparable to

⁴⁰ Patricia Tate, “The Employment Outlook for Occupations Tasked with Building America’s Infrastructure,” *Beyond the Numbers* 7, no. 17 (October 2018), <https://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/volume-7/the-employment-outlook-for-occupations-tasked-with-building-americas-infrastructure.htm>.

⁴¹ Source: Tate, “Employment Outlook.”

⁴² “Gov. Rick Snyder: Marshall Plan Investment Will Make Michigan the National Model in Developing and Attracting Talent,” State of Michigan Former Governors, February 22, 2018, https://www.michigan.gov/formergovernors/0,4584,7-212-96477_90815_57657-460959--,00.html.

or higher than those completing undergraduate degrees and often begin receiving salaries much quicker than college graduates, making job-related training a desirable option (see Figure 3).⁴³

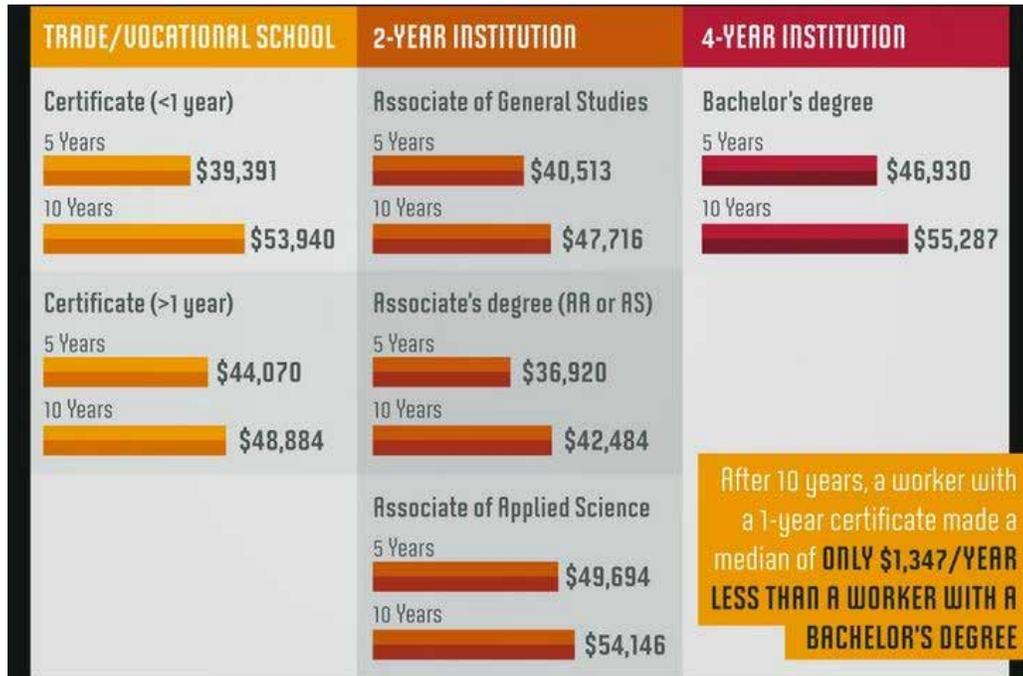


Figure 3. Median Salary Comparison, Trade/Vocational School versus College⁴⁴

Nationally, in 2017, the limited pool of qualified candidates and the demand for skilled workers resulted in 70 percent of employers seeking to fill vacancies in their businesses.⁴⁵ The Bureau of Labor Statistics provides a promising outlook for skilled-trade jobs, and the projections indicate a rise in construction-sector employment, which should encourage industry to consider vocational-based offender training as an opportunity to hire

⁴³ Rose Leadem, "Trade School vs. College: Which Is Right for You?," *Entrepreneur*, July 8, 2018, <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/316320>.

⁴⁴ Source: Leadem, "Trade School vs. College."

⁴⁵ "Seventy-Percent of Contractors Have a Hard Time Finding Qualified Craft Workers to Hire amid Growing Construction Demand, National Survey Finds," Associated General Contractors of America, August 29, 2017, <https://www.agc.org/news/2017/08/29/seventy-percent-contractors-have-hard-time-finding-qualified-craft-workers-hire-am-0>.

and fill positions (see Figure 4).⁴⁶ The evidence indicates a current and projected need for skilled labor.

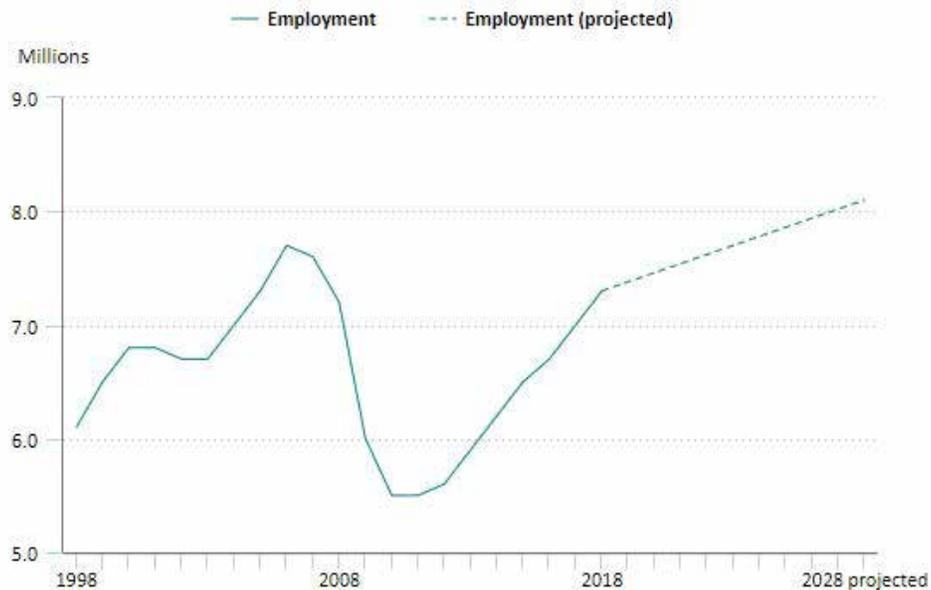


Figure 4. Construction Industry Employment, January 1998–July 2018 and Projected to 2028⁴⁷

C. CORRECTIONAL VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Educational and training programs have existed for many years in correctional environments. In the 1930s, these programs began to serve as a means of rehabilitation, and the belief was that academic and vocational programs could have a positive effect on offenders.⁴⁸

Evidence suggests a correlation between unemployment and crime. A 1991 study conducted by Anderson, Schumacker, and Anderson compared offenders who participated in vocational and educational programs with those who did not. The research found that

⁴⁶ Kevin S. Dubina et al., “Projections Overview and Highlights, 2018–28,” *Monthly Labor Review* (October 2019), <https://doi.org/10.21916/mlr.2019.21>.

⁴⁷ Source: Dubina et al., “Projections Overview and Highlights, 2018–28.”

⁴⁸ Timothy J. Flanagan et al., *Prison Education Research Project: Final Report* (Huntsville, TX: Sam Houston Press, September 1994), 10, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED395209.pdf>.

“because many of these people [incarcerated offenders] have no significant job skills, it seems logical to deduce that vocational training is not only a required and responsible response to a situation, but that it also has utility in reducing recidivism.”⁴⁹ Gerber and Fritsch found while composing a literature review of the field that “a correlation between vocational training and a variety of outcomes generally considered positive for either society or correctional institutions: lower recidivism rates, lower parole revocation rates, better post-release employment patterns, and better institutional disciplinary records.”⁵⁰

My nearly 30 years of service with MDOC have shown that most correctional facilities incorporate offender work programs into the daily operations of the facility. These work programs support day-to-day facility operations and provide offenders with a steady income. Moreover, these jobs are considered privileged opportunities that allow additional freedom from confinement to a cell or room. While incarcerated, prisoners may be required to work; however, work assignments are not punitive, and offenders may gain valuable work experience.

Correctional agencies also benefit from work programs by reducing operating and care costs. For example, when offenders produce and prepare food, they reduce the need for additional staff. Moreover, the use of offenders for the manufacture and repair of goods used by correctional facilities—mattresses and clothing, for instance—decreases expenses billed to taxpayers. Work programs reduce the idleness of offenders, which might prevent nefarious behavior as a result of boredom, and teach inmates how to maintain a schedule while fulfilling the obligations of a job.

1. U.S. Programs

MDOC policies require offenders to be active during incarceration through work assignments or general education diploma (GED) classes. Work assignments vary in the

⁴⁹ Dennis B. Anderson, Randall E. Schumacker, and Sara L. Anderson, “Releasee Characteristics and Parole Success,” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 17, no. 1–2 (1991): 134, https://doi.org/10.1300/J076v17n01_10.

⁵⁰ Jurg Gerber and Eric J. Fritsch, “Adult Academic and Vocational Correctional Education Programs: A Review of Recent Research,” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 22, no. 1–2 (1995): 131, https://doi.org/10.1300/J076v22n01_08.

requisite level of education and knowledge, and many offer on-the-job training. For example, MDOC's job duties include food preparation, janitorial work, grounds maintenance, machinist work (e.g., to make license plates or mattresses and to operate printers for publishing), clerical work for the library or school, assistance to disabled offenders, and observation aid, among others.

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) has partnered with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and the Los Angeles County Fire Department for the California Inmate Firefighter program. The program employs approximately 3,100 inmates, trained to a level equivalent to seasonal firefighters, at 43 camps throughout California.⁵¹ To be eligible for the program, inmates must volunteer, have less than five years remaining on their sentence, be in good physical condition, and be carefully screened for security risks.⁵²

Training for inmate firefighters consists of an initial two-week course followed by four hours per week of advanced training. The vocational program instills teamwork and teaches wildland fire safety skills. In 2018, the CDCR, CAL FIRE, and the California Corps collaborated to create a Firefighter Training and Certification Program in Ventura County, California, which provides advanced training for parolees who were former inmate firefighters, providing an opportunity for full-time employment with CAL FIRE.⁵³ The level of training and certification for offenders provides a pathway for them to secure credentials that are required for similar jobs after release, thus increasing their employment opportunities.

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections offers a wide variety of vocational programs, including auto mechanics; warehouse operations; computer-aided design; construction; electronics; and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning. Inmates interview

⁵¹ "Conservation (Fire) Camps," California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, accessed March 22, 2020, <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/conservation-camps/>.

⁵² California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

⁵³ Eric Escalante, "California's Inmate Firefighters: 9 Things to Know," ABC 10 Sacramento, October 29, 2019, <https://www.abc10.com/article/news/local/wildfire/california-inmate-firefighters/103-0fdca69-2f30-4abe-99a1-838364d395e6>.

with corrections counselors for program interests and skill assessments to determine which programs offenders are interested in and what may enhance their chances of employment after release.

This program began offering opportunities for inmates to earn a National Center for Construction Education and Research certificate upon program completion, resulting in better employability after release.⁵⁴ Pennsylvania Corrections Secretary John Wetzel believes inmates increase their chance of success by participating in vocational training: “Every year the DOC [Department of Corrections] releases 19,000 individuals back into their communities following incarceration. While these individuals are committed to our care and custody, we work to provide them with a variety of educational and vocational programs to teach them the skills that they can use after incarceration to obtain and keep life-sustaining jobs.”⁵⁵

2. Australia

As early as 2002, Australia developed a national strategy for vocational education and training (VET) called *Shaping Our Future*, which identified key objectives to improve the VET program and offender access to quality training and to expand employment opportunities after release.⁵⁶ In conjunction with *Shaping Our Future*, state and territorial corrections collaborated with training authorities to produce implementation framework called *Rebuilding Lives*, which “calls for ‘positive steps . . . to achieve equality of participation and achievement’ for people who face barriers due to . . . imprisonment.”⁵⁷ This strategy allocates resources and prioritizes programming for offenders re-entering society. It also identifies four important objectives to support the policy: improving access to applications by offenders, encouraging involvement and achievement in a range of

⁵⁴ Melinda Druga, “Inmates Earn HVAC Certification for Successful Reentry,” *Pennsylvania Business Report*, April 29, 2019, <https://pennbizreport.com/news/12868-inmates-earn-hvac-certification-for-successful-reentry/>.

⁵⁵ Druga.

⁵⁶ Australian National Training Authority, *Rebuilding Lives: VET for Prisoners and Offenders* (Canberra: Australian National Training Authority, 2006), 4, <https://acea.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Rebuilding-Lives.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Australian National Training Authority, 7.

disciplines, contributing to lifelong learning after release from confinement, and developing a system to provide VET to offenders.⁵⁸

Rebuilding Lives includes several strategies to maximize the success of the program for offenders from both the national and the local level to promote program success. Some of the key highlights of the program include

- Research accessibility within a correctional setting
- Market the programs using innovation to engage the offender population
- Promote existing support mechanisms and incentives available to support the program
- Include VET in offender supervision plans, and include education and training in the development and review of offender plans
- Identify prerequisite programs to improve success in the VET programs
- Conduct a knowledge and skills assessment of offenders before programming
- Ensure that a documentation process exists for offender records
- Enhance the links between correctional agencies and outside jurisdictions, and encourage apprenticeships
- Showcase successes, and reward offenders to promote the program
- Provide adequate resources for program success including funding and skilled instructors
- Develop the physical infrastructure within the correctional environment to support programs
- Create incentives for employers to hire trained offenders after release
- Continue training opportunities after release to further professional growth
- Partner with employers and adapt the program to meet the needs of employers

⁵⁸ Australian National Training Authority, 8.

- Monitor and track offender participation for data collection⁵⁹

The strategies put forth by the Australian government in collaboration with the correctional agencies in Australia have reinforced the importance of offender success through educational and vocational training. They have also set the foundation for VET programs in Australian correctional facilities. For example, Cadell Training Centre, a low-level security prison in South Australia, is providing education and skills-based training to its offender population through a partnership with South Australian (SA) Vocational Education and Training, or VET-SA. This governmental organization provides training qualifications for employment and offers over 6,000 courses of study.⁶⁰

Through the partnership with VET-SA, the Department for Correctional Services offers educational programs as well as job skill training aimed at offenders for in-demand jobs such as forklift operator, chauffeur or driver, heavy construction-equipment operator, tree trimmer, truck driver, small construction equipment operator, roadwork and traffic manager, and barista.⁶¹ Additionally, offenders may attain certification in firefighting and work alongside custody staff and members of the public to assist the country fire service in responding to bushfires, vehicle accidents, house and boat fires, and hazardous material spills.⁶²

Australia's prison industries provide an opportunity for offenders to seek employment while incarcerated on one of the prison's farms or agricultural nurseries. Farms produce olive oil, citrus fruits, dairy cattle, and milk. In addition to helping supply the prisons and the community with produce and dairy, offenders receive education, training, and qualifications while employed in various areas of agriculture, livestock

⁵⁹ Australian National Training Authority, 12–15.

⁶⁰ "About MySkills," Commonwealth of Australia, accessed February 21, 2020, <https://www.myskills.gov.au/more/about/>.

⁶¹ "Vocational Training," South Australian Department for Correctional Services, accessed August 4, 2020, <https://www.corrections.sa.gov.au/Rehabilitation-education-and-work/education-and-training/vocational-training>.

⁶² "Prison Work Areas," South Australian Department for Correctional Services, accessed August 4, 2020, <https://www.corrections.sa.gov.au/Rehabilitation-education-and-work/work-opportunities/work-areas>.

management, and maintenance of agricultural vehicles used in the farming industry.⁶³ In addition to agricultural jobs, Australia prison industries also provide training in certification for woodworking, metal fabrication, masonry, and electronics, where offenders can obtain civil construction and engineering certifications for post-release employment.⁶⁴

Finally, for offenders nearing release from incarceration, the Department of Correctional Services coordinates temporary release for work services. For example, the Job Club, an independently run program designed to help offenders locate employers, teaches them to craft resumes and prepares them for interviews in front of potential employers.⁶⁵ Offenders may also participate in the Work Release program, which allows offenders an opportunity to locate employment and report for work each day and then return to the correctional facility in the evening after work.⁶⁶ Australia reinforces the importance of local employers to promote the rehabilitation and reentry of offenders returning to society.

Evidence indicates that Australia's use of education, coupled with vocational-based offender programming, has a positive effect on recidivism rates among offenders completing the program. In 2018, Cale et al. indicated that offenders who participated in education and vocational programs were twice as likely not to return to prison within the first two years, and every year beyond two years further decreased the chances of ever returning to prison.⁶⁷ VET programs are producing positive results to reduce recidivism.

⁶³ "Farming and Horticulture," South Australian Department for Correctional Services, accessed August 4, 2020, <https://www.corrections.sa.gov.au/Rehabilitation-education-and-work/work-opportunities/types-of-industry/farming>.

⁶⁴ "Engineering and Woodwork," South Australian Department for Correctional Services, accessed August 4, 2020, <https://www.corrections.sa.gov.au/Rehabilitation-education-and-work/work-opportunities/types-of-industry/engineering-and-woodwork>.

⁶⁵ "Pre-Release Work Activities," South Australian Department for Correctional Services, accessed August 4, 2020, <https://www.corrections.sa.gov.au/Rehabilitation-education-and-work/work-opportunities/types-of-industry/pre-release-activities>.

⁶⁶ South Australian Department for Correctional Services.

⁶⁷ Jesse Cale et al., "Australian Prison Vocational Education and Training and Returns to Custody among Male and Female Ex-Prisoners: A Cross-Jurisdictional Study," *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 52, no. 1 (2019): 138, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004865818779418>.

Findings from a study conducted in Queensland showed a 9 percent decrease from 32 percent to 23 percent for offenders participating in VET programs.⁶⁸

Australia's approach to correctional systems is not universal and varies among the states and territories in the country. As a result, not all correctional facilities participate in educational or vocational offender programs. As a policy recommendation, unified participation could help Australia promote offender success on a national level.

3. Norway

Norway has one of the lowest recidivism rates of all countries, at 20 percent.⁶⁹ Rehabilitation, instead of punishment, is the primary function of incarceration, and inmate supervision is regulated by “dynamic security,” a form of guidance built on interpersonal relationships between offenders and staff, to maintain a safe environment.⁷⁰ Given the amount of interaction between staff and offenders, this style of dynamic security may help identify potential issues before they occur, allowing intervention at the lowest level possible. It is this style of policy that encourages offenders to seek normalcy for a return to society, which includes supporting themselves and others by securing and maintaining employment.

Norway's low recidivism rates may be a result of the country's policy of normality—that sentencing to incarceration should progress toward the offender's return to the community.⁷¹ Norway's correctional facilities operate as if offenders are only “temporarily” removed from society; as a result, incarcerated living conditions reflect as close as possible standard living conditions outside the facility. Norway's criminal justice

⁶⁸ Victor J. Callan and John Gardner, “The Role of VET in Recidivism in Australia,” in *Vocational Education and Training for Adult Prisoners and Offenders in Australia: Research Readings*, ed. Susan Dawe (Adelaide, South Australia: National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2007), <http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/89328>.

⁶⁹ Denis Yukhnenko, Shivpriya Sridhar, and Seena Fazel, “A Systematic Review of Criminal Recidivism Rates Worldwide: 3-Year Update,” *Wellcome Open Research* 4, no. 28 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.12688/wellcomeopenres.14970.2>.

⁷⁰ Emily Labutta, “The Prisoner as One of Us: Norwegian Wisdom for American Penal Practice,” *Emory International Law Review* 31, no. 2 (2017), <http://law.emory.edu/eilr/content/volume-31/issue-2/comments/prisoner-norwegian-wisdom-american-penal-practice.html>.

⁷¹ Labutta.

system appears to recognize the importance of education and training to employability and successful reintegration into society. As such, there is a robust relationship between the criminal justice system and the education system that allows offenders access to primary and secondary levels of education to help them improve critical thinking and increase the chance of securing employment after incarceration.⁷²

In addition to education, Vox—the national trade union for competence policy—participates with the correctional system to provide fundamental skill training for jobs within the correctional facility. Jobs resemble employment opportunities available within the communities, such as kitchen work, cleaning, car care and maintenance, and woodworking.⁷³ Halden Prison in Norway, a maximum-security prison, has programs available for offenders in the areas of auto mechanics, carpentry, graphic design, and culinary arts to prepare them for jobs after release.⁷⁴

Although Norway has one of the lowest recidivism rates in the world, it does not have vocational or skills-based programs as robust as some other countries. However, Norway’s criminal justice system reinforces the importance of education, offering primary through college-level education. Its recidivism rates appear to be low primarily based on the methods used for the confinement of offenders.

D. SUMMARY

The examination of various programs revealed that correctional agencies in the United States, Australia, and Norway incorporate variations of employment readiness programming. Each program reinforces the importance of employment after release from confinement to enhance the success of offenders and to reduce recidivism. While Norway has the lowest recidivism rate in the world, its vocational or skills-based programs are limited. Offenders learn to work jobs to support operations within the correctional

⁷² “Education and Training,” Kriminalomsorgen,” accessed February 23, 2020, <http://www.kriminalomsorgen.no/utdanning-og-opplaering.237883.no.html>.

⁷³ Kriminalomsorgen.

⁷⁴ “How Norway Turns Criminals into Good Neighbours,” BBC News, July 7, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-48885846>.

facilities, many of which resemble outside employment opportunities. Australia and the United States highlight their partnerships with agencies outside the correctional facilities to bolster resources for programs such as providing training and support for offenders after release. All three countries attempt to connect the training offenders receive while incarcerated to employment for in-demand jobs.

Partnerships, resources, and training for in-demand jobs are critical components for success. These components should be part of the development and implementation of a vocational-based program for correctional agencies.

III. MDOC VOCATIONAL VILLAGE CASE STUDY

This chapter examines MDOC’s Vocational Village program to help identify components for conceptual model development.

A. PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND HISTORY

The Village is a program that focuses on vocational trade training and prepares prisoners for careers within the skilled-trade discipline for in-demand jobs. The program streamlines the pipeline from incarceration to employment by partnering with the public and private sectors and identifying the job market to develop the curriculum. Legislative support is essential for most reform programs, so both the current and previous governors have actively engaged in bridging state agencies, universities, and colleges to focus on supporting correctional reform programs.

The overall goal of the Village is to enhance public safety by reducing recidivism. Offenders who are employed have a higher chance of long-term success, and as a result, communities are safer and offenders become productive members of society. The Village offers a holistic approach to offender success. The participants of the program are residents of a “village”—separate from general population offenders and living together—which supports and somewhat mimics life on the outside, similar to a college campus.

Furthermore, offenders study together in designated areas in the evenings to learn and prepare for on-the-job and classroom training within Vocational Village learning areas. The programs provide offenders with employment counselors, teach them soft skills, and assist them as they begin the program and through parole.⁷⁵ Michigan’s vocational program, while still in its infancy, appears to be flourishing based on its defined performance measurements.

MDOC’s Vocational Village piloted at the Richard A. Handlon Correctional Facility in Ionia in 2016, providing six skilled-trade curricula for offenders: automotive

⁷⁵ Joe Cote, “What Are Soft Skills and Why Are They Important in the Workplace?,” Southern New Hampshire University, April 3, 2018, <https://www.snhu.edu/about-us/newsroom/2018/04/what-are-soft-skills>.

technology, carpentry, computer numeric control/machine tooling, electrical, plumbing, and welding.⁷⁶ The program began with a maximum capacity of 165 offenders and employed 12 building trade instructors. The goal was to provide an environment for offenders to participate and complete career and technical education programs to enhance employment opportunities after release from confinement. The original site for Vocational Village was a medium-level correctional facility where existing classrooms received physical plant upgrades and equipment to begin programming, which may have helped offset the initial cost of starting from scratch.

Due to the success of Vocational Village, a second site was added in 2017 to a low-level correctional facility in Jackson, Michigan, expanding the student capacity by 240 and offering additional programs. The location in Jackson utilized existing space, previously used as a factory by the facility. The Jackson Village offers many of the same classes as the Ionia location as well as robotics, computer coding, masonry/concrete, forklift operation, commercial driver's license/truck driving, and tree trimming.⁷⁷

MDOC expanded in 2019 to a third village located at Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility in Ypsilanti, Michigan. The third site totals approximately 27,000 square feet since the construction of a 17,000-square-foot addition. It will provide education and training for up to 180 women offenders in the following programs: carpentry, computer coding, cosmetology, 3D printing, and graphic design.⁷⁸

Every week, Monday through Friday, Vocational Village participants eat breakfast and then head to "work," where they learn vocational trades and mirror a workday. Lunch breaks occur daily, and then offenders return to Vocational Village for the remainder of the workday. Weekends and evenings are for leisure and recreational activities such as video

⁷⁶ "Vocational Village Named Newsmaker Finalist for 2016," Michigan Department of Corrections, accessed March 7, 2020, https://www.michigan.gov/corrections/0,4551,7-119-33218_75514-399276--,00.html.

⁷⁷ "Vocational Village," Michigan Department of Corrections, accessed October 27, 2019, https://www.michigan.gov/corrections/0,4551,7-119-33218_75514---,00.html.

⁷⁸ "Michigan Department of Corrections Breaks Ground on First Vocational Village Site for Women," State of Michigan, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.michigan.gov/som/0,4669,7-192-47796-483426--,00.html>.

games, basketball, and pre-planned holiday events. The purpose of operating similarly to life “outside” is to strive toward offenders’ having a job waiting once they are released, being equipped with critical thinking and social skills, and not returning to prison.

Offenders spend full days receiving lecture-based and hands-on class sessions, and most receive state and nationally recognized certifications for the trades they are learning. Extensive training and stackable credentials help make the students more marketable for employment. The Village is thriving in part because Michigan offers the prime landscape as a blue-collar state with an enormous gap in skilled, qualified trade workers. Skilled-trade shortages in Michigan have provided a unique opportunity for vocational-based offenders to secure employment after release.

The estimated expense to establish the first two villages cost taxpayers approximately \$7 million, funded through the existing agency budget and federal dollars.⁷⁹ The average annual operating expense for the MDOC Education Division is roughly \$38 million, which includes staffing, administration, and support costs of academic and Village vocational programs at all correctional facilities. The cost consists of high school equivalency preparation and adult primary education for prisoners who do not possess a high school diploma or the equivalent, as well as career and technical education in vocational trade programs, some of which provide state and national certifications.⁸⁰

B. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

MDOC’s Offender Employment and Opportunities Unit constructed a process with MDOC Research to produce current, accurate monthly data for the Vocational Village program. All administrations within MDOC share data, which help to evaluate the program and refine program processes. Continuous data improvements allow multiple MDOC

⁷⁹ Lindsay VanHulle, “Vocational Village Skilled Trades Training to Be Offered at Second State Prison,” Crain’s Detroit Business, August 2, 2016, <https://www.crainsdetroit.com/article/20160802/BLOG020/160809955/vocational-village-skilled-trades-training-to-be-offered-at-second>.

⁸⁰ 2016 Mich. Pub. Acts No. 340, <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2015-2016/publicact/pdf/2016-PA-0340.pdf>; 2017 Mich. Pub. Acts No. 107, <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2017-2018/publicact/pdf/2017-PA-0107.pdf>; 2018 Mich. Pub. Acts No. 207, <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2017-2018/publicact/pdf/2018-PA-0207.pdf>; 2019 Mich. Pub. Acts No. 64, <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/publications/AppropriationBillsPassed/2019/2019-mpla-4231-Corrections.pdf>.

administrations to benefit from this program. The Offender Employment and Opportunities Unit is working to produce an initial job placement rate—employment within 30 days of parole—and job retention figure—how long the graduates retain employment—in the future. Additionally, data allow the program to identify the unemployed graduates, so the Offender Employment and Opportunities Unit can produce a “candidate blast” to MDOC’s potential partnering employers.

1. Definitions

Definitions developed by MDOC’s Offender Employment and Opportunities Unit are provided to understand the performance measurements (see Appendix A). The descriptions are specific to MDOC and are not representative of other correctional agencies or organizations. These definitions are essential for the development of a conceptual model as they help to identify potential performance measure components.

2. Program Measurement and Metrics

Measurements for the success of offenders participating in the Village program are established by the program administrator with input from the rest of the team and approved by the director (see Appendix B).

3. Program Data Collection Samples

The following information represents monthly data for the Richard A. Handlon Correctional Facility (see Table 1). Monthly data collection helps program directors monitor class vacancies and maintain scheduling. As indicated in Table 1, in January 2020, 99 percent of offenders who enrolled in classes completed their respective programs. Completion of a skills training course, combined with state and national credentials, often results in potential offers of employment before release. The completion rate highlights the commitment by staff and offenders and indicates the program’s measure of success.

Table 1. January 2020 Data Sample, Richard Handlon Correctional Facility

Offenders completing the program	83/84	99%
Amount of completions by trade	36	
Auto Tech	5	
Carpentry	6	
CNC	10	
Plumbing/Electrical	0	
Welding	15	
Enrollment by Trade	155	
Auto Tech	38	
Carpentry	17	
CNC	36	
Plumbing/Electrical	27	
Welding	37	
Monthly Vacancy Rate		129%
Seating Capacity		120
Seats Occupied		155

Capacity at Vocational Village is 270 students, comprising 150 seats at the Parnall Correctional Facility and 120 seats at the Richard A. Handlon Correctional Facility. As of summer 2020, only male offenders participate in vocational-based training. The Women’s Huron Valley Correctional Facility is slated to begin construction for its Vocational Village program in late 2020 or early 2021. It expects to offer approximately 120 seats in various programs (see Figure 5).

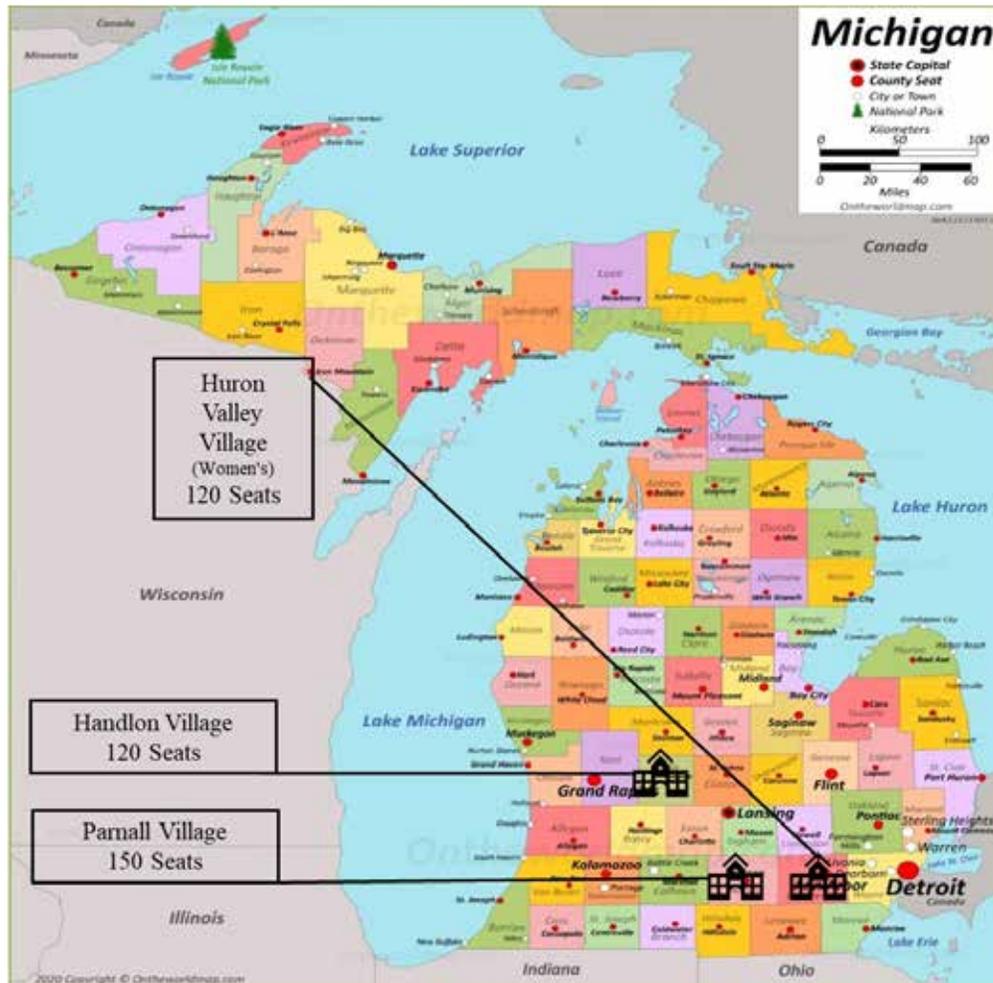


Figure 5. MDOC Vocational Village Locations and Participant Capacities⁸¹

Since the pilot program began in 2016, Vocational Village has graduated over 800 offenders and has a current return-to-prison rate of 4.9 percent (see Table 2). The Village’s return-to-prison rate is well below the overall agency rate of 26.7 percent. All offenders participating in the Village program receive support from MDOC employment counselors to assist them with locating employment. MDOC partners with more than 600 businesses that support Village operations.

⁸¹ Adapted from “Michigan Map,” On the World Map, accessed August 16, 2020, <http://ontheworldmap.com/usa/state/michigan/>.

Table 2. Overall Program Data, 2017–March 2020

Total Number of Program Participants	830
Total Number of Returns to Prison	41
Return to Prison Rate	4.90%
Active Parole Total	480
Employment Rate of Program Graduates	65%
Successful Discharges from Parole	298
Pre-Release Job Offers	51%

As more seats become available through program expansion, which allows more offenders access to participate, the goal is to continue to reduce the number of offenders who return to prison and to lower the overall recidivism rates of MDOC.

C. RECIDIVISM RATES

MDOC defines recidivism as the number of those returning to prison within three years after release from confinement, either paroled or discharged from their sentence. Beginning in 2015, the return-to-prison rate was over 30 percent. In 2016, MDOC started a pilot program for Vocational Village and added a second location in 2018. Since the inception of the Village pilot in 2016, the return-to-prison rate has been less than 30 percent. Once the second location came online in 2018, the rate remained below 29 percent. In 2019, the rate fell to its lowest ever—26.7 percent (see Figure 6). MDOC now sustains one of the 10 lowest recidivism rates in the country.

As a result of the return-to-prison rate measured within a three-year timeframe, only one year of recidivism rate data is available for Vocational Village. That rate is currently at 4.9 percent. Time is needed to allow for a more extensive study that may support the mission of Vocational Village, which is to reduce recidivism and crime to protect the public. As long as the current projections maintain course, the percentage of offenders returning to prison after completing the Village program is far below MDOC’s agency rate and well below the lowest recidivism rates in the world.

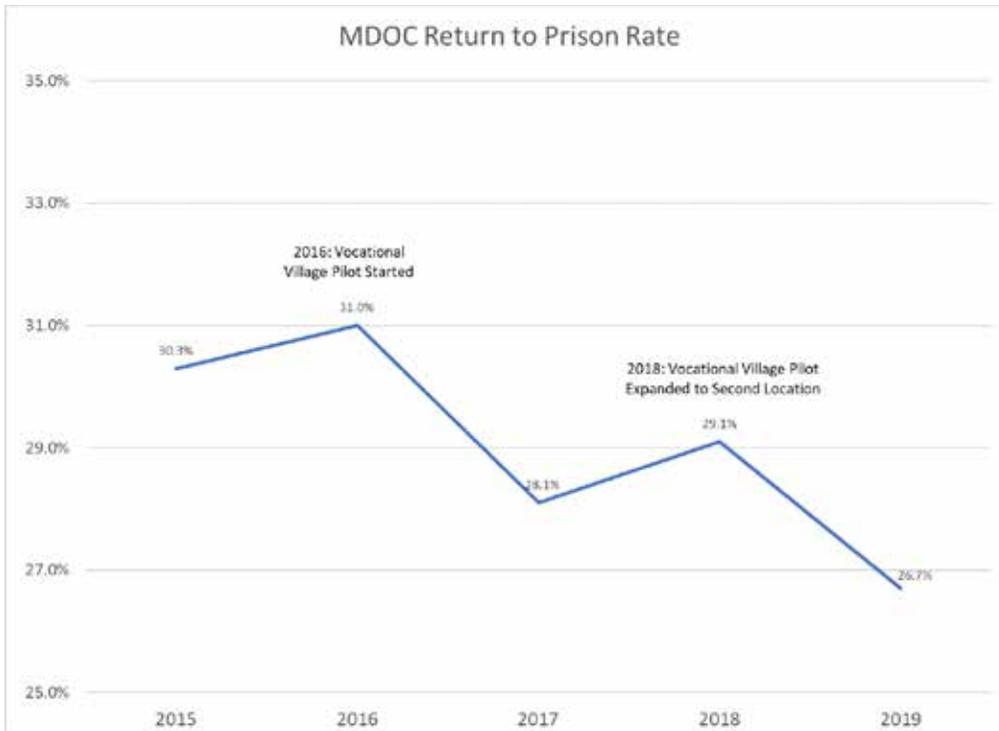


Figure 6. MDOC Return-to-Prison Percentage, 2015–2019

1. Program Graduates and Field Supervision

An examination of the program indicates that offenders who depart prison after completion of the Village program maintain a 65 percent employment rate. The initial success of the employment rate for graduates may be due in part to job offers before their release from prison, but support does not stop there. MDOC provides specialized training for parole agents assigned to supervise offenders from the Village program. The agents work directly with employment counselors from MDOC, employers, and external support agencies to provide guidance and assistance to offenders to reduce the chances of reoffending.

Parole agents with caseload supervision of Village graduates attend training delivered by faculty of the Village. Agents are brought to one of the two current villages to observe how the program operates, talk with staff, and meet with potential offenders assigned to their caseload. Agents who supervise Village graduates are responsible only for those completing the program to coordinate with the multiple employers and

stakeholders to reinforce partnerships and networking. Training for parole agents started within the last year, and program administrators believe this will further advance the offenders' successful reentry. Integrating parole agents into the process should also improve data collection efforts, which will assist in making data-driven program decisions.

2. Projections

As of this writing, unemployment in Michigan is at an all-time low, causing employers and businesses in Michigan to find creative ways to recruit a trained and talented workforce. Partnering employers have relayed to Village faculty that finding quality employees trained in the trades industry is complicated. With the baby boomer generation amid retirement age, there will be fewer skilled trade-certified people to employ, which may result in gaps for in-demand jobs.⁸²

With the shortage of workers in mind and to provide equal opportunity to female offenders, MDOC is currently in the construction phase of a third Vocational Village site at the Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility. The project will add roughly 120 student seats, bringing the overall Vocational Village capacity to approximately 390 students.

The rate of employment from a vocational-based offender program may be largely contingent on the unemployment rates in specific job markets within the geographic area where offenders are released. Village employment counselors collaborate with potential employers to determine where the most significant employment gaps exist when considering adding courses to the curriculum. The continuous review of the curriculum helps keep Village graduates competitive for in-demand jobs. Events such as economic recessions and the coronavirus outbreak will have an impact on employment opportunities for Village graduates; however, there is insufficient data available to assess the magnitude of the effect.

⁸² Taryn Netzer, "Baby Boomers Retiring, Leaving Many Open Trades Positions," *Industrial Safety & Hygiene News*, June 11, 2019, <https://www.ishn.com/articles/110888-baby-boomers-retiring-leaving-many-open-trades-positions?v=preview>.

D. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACT

Funding for the initial development of Vocational Village emerged from a combination of existing education funds within MDOC and federal grants. Responsibility for Village operations rests with the Education Division. It secured federal grants through educational grant opportunities. The reported capital to establish Village locations at the Richard A. Handlon and Parnall Correctional Facilities was approximately \$7 million.⁸³ Annual operating costs consist mainly of full-time positions for skilled-trade instructors, employment counselors, custody and security, and administrative support staff, and are under the umbrella of the overall MDOC appropriations for offender education. A specific breakdown of those costs was not reported or available as they are not a separate line item within the education budget. Completing a cost-benefit or return-on-investment analysis was not possible due to insufficient data.

Determining the Village's return on investment for MDOC is complex. While there may be estimated savings by reducing the number of offenders who return to prison, it is difficult to quantify savings for other areas affected by crime. There are costs associated with law enforcement, the court system, and county jails. Offenders who maintain employment also contribute through taxes and other contributions to their communities.

The average cost to house an offender in MDOC is approximately \$36,399 annually, and 789 offenders have successfully graduated from the Village over the last three years without returning to prison.⁸⁴ Simple math would indicate that the program has resulted in approximately \$28.7 million savings to MDOC over three years. Unfortunately, there is no way to know for sure whether a graduate might have reoffended had he not participated in the program, so it would be misleading to identify this as realized savings. Nonetheless, the results appear to show a positive trend—accepting other potential variables yet to be studied.

⁸³ "Vocational Village," America Working Forward, accessed July 5, 2020, <https://awfmagazine.uschamberfoundation.org/vocational-village/>.

⁸⁴ Robin R. Risko, "Budget Briefing: Corrections" (Lansing: Michigan House Fiscal Agency, January 2019), https://www.house.mi.gov/hfa/PDF/Briefings/Corrections_BudgetBriefing_fy18-19.pdf.

Additionally, the Village is just nearing three years since implementation. It lacks sufficient data to make an accurate determination based on the stated definition of recidivism as a return to prison within three years. With the current return-to-prison rate at 4.9 percent, compared to the overall agency rate of 26.7 percent, there is support for the assumption the program is providing a financial benefit to the taxpayers as well as others affected by crime.

There is no doubt the Village provides a social return on investment for the State of Michigan. Offenders become contributing members of society, may improve their family relationships, provide for their families, carry a sense of pride and self-worth, and may get a fresh start for past mistakes. Removing the stigma of a felony conviction may be difficult to overcome when attempting to obtain employment, but securing a job offer before leaving prison can help mitigate the stigma. Communities benefit from a reduction in crime, increased economics, and potential decreases in assisting the unemployed. Employers receive well-trained employees who support their business. MDOC has adopted the position that preparing offenders to succeed through vocational-based training is value added.

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IV. VOCATIONAL PROGRAM CONSIDERATIONS

There are many security challenges associated with programming for offenders in confinement. Most correctional facilities do not have the physical plant environment capable of accommodating the equipment necessary for skilled-trade training. Moreover, vocational training requires numerous hand tools specific to each trade, machines, welders, building supplies (e.g., concrete, lumber, electrical, and metal), and the physical floorspace to safely and adequately train students. Additionally, within a secure setting, tool and material accountability are critical to safety and security as missing tools and materials have the potential to become weapons or be used for other nefarious purposes. In addition to potential unintended use, missing equipment often requires a stoppage of programs and a lockdown until the tool or material is located, affecting the entire operation. Consequently, most confinement facilities have dedicated personnel for the accountability of resources for vocational programs.

This chapter discusses program information from the MDOC Village as well as additional considerations for program development and implementation. First, it addresses the cultural change necessary for enhanced offender programming, the selection of program staff, and evaluation, screening, and expectations of participants. Next, the chapter finishes with classroom and program delivery considerations including the use of technology for content delivery, security, and resource needs.

A. IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

Implementation of a vocational-based program is not just about the resources needed—it involves the staff working at the facility, the agency itself, and the community. Vocational opportunities for offenders can be a costly endeavor using taxpayer funding. A solid proposal should include the benefits, not only the higher employment rates of offenders and reduction of crime but a cost–benefit analysis for program implementation and comparison to the success rates of other programs offering similar goals, objectives, and measures.

Accurate and frequent messaging about the program’s intentions and success may bolster support from the community as well as additional funding sources. The message should emphasize better preparation for offenders to become productive members of society and to support themselves and their families through higher-paying jobs after release. Furthermore, correctional staff attitudes toward prisoner programs and generally toward prisoner populations are an essential component to program success. Paula S. Weber and James E. Weber indicate several variables that can affect employee attitudes toward change (see Table 3).

Table 3. Potential Variables Affecting Employee Attitudes⁸⁵

Trust in Management	Employees trust the judgment of the current administration and their performance before adjustments.
Perceptions of Supervisory Support for Improvement	Inspiration and implementation of employee ideas. Employee participation is encouraged and garnered.
Perceptions of Organizational Readiness for Change	
Feedback	The agency provides feedback to obtain buy-in. Two-way communication is critical to success.
Participation	Employee participation may help determine the level of support from employees.
Goal Clarity	It improves trust in management and provides a path forward for employees.

My nearly 30 years of correctional experience have shown that implementation of programs can be difficult in a correctional setting as custodial employees tend to lean toward a security or punishment culture instead of a rehabilitative or program culture. On the other hand, non-custodial employees tend to favor offender programs as their job duties typically relate to offender success. Additionally, newer generations of correctional officers tend to see their job as a combination of both security and programming and appear more accepting of programs designed to enhance offender success. The agency must create

⁸⁵ Adapted from Paula S. Weber and James E. Weber, “Changes in Employee Perceptions during Organizational Change,” *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 22, no. 5/6 (September 2001), <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437730110403222>.

a policy with simple, measurable, and attainable objectives that are easily understood by staff. Employees who are ready for change will adopt new programs while others will comply as part of their job's responsibilities.

B. PROGRAM INSTRUCTORS AND PARTICIPANTS

1. Instructors and Mentors

Programming within secure correctional environments may be challenging but not impossible. The role of a vocational instructor should not be limited to one's expertise in a field of study; instructors must also be prepared to mentor and counsel offenders for successful reintegration into society.

The goal of an instructor is to interact with offenders and teach them the trade skills necessary to obtain employment and the means to cope with potential issues that may occur once employed. For example, an instructor should discuss the importance of punctuality, as well as strategies for dealing with difficult co-workers and having the right attitude and work ethic. Mike Smith, a culinary arts vocational instructor, says, "I don't limit what the prisoners do. I expect them to participate. . . . Today employers are looking for enthusiasm and attitude. I try to instill that in the prisoners and get them to understand that if you don't have a good attitude and a good work ethic, you aren't going to have the best opportunities."⁸⁶

Recruitment and hiring of instructors should include a review of the program's objectives and the agency's vision for offender success. Instructors will also be working in a secure environment and need to understand necessary custodial and security practices. Seasoned correctional, vocational instructors understand there is much more to teach than just a trade. They coach life skills, responsibilities, and communication and must be flexible and resilient in a challenging environment. Instructor selection can support program success or cause program problems—choose wisely.

⁸⁶ "Vocational Education Program Teaches Marketable Skills to Prisoners," Michigan Department of Corrections, accessed April 11, 2020, <https://www.michigan.gov/corrections/0,4551,7-119--139913--,00.html>.

2. Candidate Selection

The identification and selection process of offenders and the appropriate training program are key to successful completion and post-release employment. This critical process lends to the overall national and state goals of lowering returns to prison.⁸⁷ Vocational resources may be constrained and allow only for a limited number of program participants. Moreover, application and screening processes may help ensure the right offenders enroll in programs best suited for *their* success. While the overall objective is to reduce recidivism by teaching offenders a sought-after job skill, each offender needs an evaluation for eligibility and access to in-demand programming.

Additionally, program managers must work to ensure qualified candidates most likely to succeed are given priority access for placement when the candidate pool exceeds resource capacity. Each agency differs in terms of screening and eligibility criteria; however, it is imperative that offenders have the necessary skills to complete the requisite coursework.⁸⁸ When evaluating candidates for readiness, the following considerations may be universally applied:

- A high school diploma or GED.
- Completion of parole board–recommended programs.
- Within a set time of the offender’s earliest release date but having enough time left in sentencing to finish the program.
- The offender has an interest in vocational programming, has completed a program application, and agrees to the program’s conditions.
- If applicable, the offender has met with an agency counselor and received a recommendation for placement.
- The offender’s behavioral record must be misconduct-free for a period set forth by the agency.

⁸⁷ RAND Corporation, “Training in Prisons Reduces Recidivism.”

⁸⁸ Sarah Lawrence et al., *The Practice and Promise of Prison Programming* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, May 2002), <https://doi.org/10.1037/e720872011-001>.

- The offender is eligible for the security level of the facility where the programs are offered.
- The offender must not have any pending charges or actively participate in gang activity.

Once an offender has satisfied the requirements of the program, he would be eligible for participating in an interview process for selection into the program. Offenders should be willing to seek out assistance from current program participants or the agency's academic staff to prepare for the interview.

3. Interview Process

The purpose of an interview is to put a name with a face, build rapport, and share information between an interviewer and interviewee.⁸⁹ Interviewing a potential participant of a vocational-based program allows a panel of agency representatives to determine the level of seriousness and commitment the individual has to complete the program. Additionally, personal interactions and discussions may help offenders select the best job skill program based on their existing strengths and match them with the job market in the area where they will parole after release. Furthermore, expectations, behavior, and consequences can also be discussed during the interview process to assist offenders in determining whether the program is a good fit for them.

The entire interview process is designed to put the most qualified candidates in the limited number of seats. It provides an opportunity for offenders to take ownership and show they are committed to successful completion. Also, the interview process may allow a chance for correctional officials to educate offenders on the importance of program completion and the impact a skilled-trade job has in reducing the chances of returning to confinement.

Even though many staff interact with offenders daily, well-conducted interviews for vocational programs should make offenders feel as if they are applying for

⁸⁹ Samuel G. Trull, "Strategies of Effective Interviewing," *Harvard Business Review*, January 1, 1964, <https://hbr.org/1964/01/strategies-of-effective-interviewing>.

employment—and the staff represent the employer. The panel should portray interest and encouragement for the offender to succeed on a personal level, which often differs from the standard daily interactions with staff.

Employment counselors are an essential link to offender employment rates. MDOC employs 22 employment counselors who provide vocational counseling to all offenders at 29 correctional facilities across Michigan. Counselors train internally on the topic of motivational and vocational interviewing to improve guidance for offenders.⁹⁰ The counseling sessions are intense and lay the groundwork and pathway that sets a pace and direction for each offender.

The counseling process begins with an employment interest and aptitude assessment.⁹¹ Counselors analyze the results and then review them with the offender. The procedure targets each offender who is two to four years from one's parole board jurisdiction date.⁹² During the vocational-specific counseling session, counselors study real-time data on employment opportunities and predicted employment openings in the county where the offender will be paroled. Upon completion of counseling, the offender and the counselor discuss and choose two trades in which the offender may excel and shows potential career interest.

Following the initial counseling session, the offender is then added to a statewide waiting list for the desired trade and set up for transfer to the facility for program availability. Offenders identified as suitable candidates for Vocational Village complete an application for review. Administrative program staff review the requests, and if accepted, the offender moves to the waiting list for transfer to the appropriate village.

Before MDOC implemented employment counselors, offenders did not have an opportunity to be vocationally guided by a professional counselor. Additionally, offenders

⁹⁰ Kevin B. Stoltz and Tabitha L. Young, "Applications of Motivational Interviewing in Career Counseling: Facilitating Career Transition," *Journal of Career Development* 40, no. 4 (2013): 329–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845312455508>.

⁹¹ "Career Assessment," Career Profiles, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.careerprofiles.info/career-assessment.html>.

⁹² "Prisoner Release Date Information," Michigan Department of Corrections, accessed May 28, 2020, https://www.michigan.gov/corrections/0,4551,7-119-9741_12798-201922--,00.html.

were offered only programs available at the location where they were currently located. MDOC began implementing statewide transfers for vocational training in 2016 to provide opportunities to match offenders with the programs best suited for them. This shift resulted in flexibility to match offenders with their desired programming.

4. Background Check

In addition to interviewing candidates, conducting background checks should be a consideration for each candidate wishing to enter the program. Participants of the program who have secured employment after release have the potential to access critical infrastructure during their regular job duties and emergency events. Those offenders must pass background checks by an employer. States affected by the COVID-19 crisis have identified essential workers as truck drivers, auto repair technicians, forklift operators, and critical infrastructure workers such as utility workers, welders, and masons to sustain critical services.⁹³

Background checks vary for each type of employer outside the correctional setting but can include work, medical, substance abuse, and financial history; driving records; and social media use.⁹⁴ Background checks conducted within the correctional setting may be different. Still, they will help screen candidates, choose those best suited to pass a public-sector background check, and ensure successful completion of vocational programs while incarcerated.

Internal background checks may also be necessary as educational and vocational programs offer more freedom and less supervision for offenders during classroom sessions. Offenders often work independently and may have greater access to potentially sensitive and critical items such as tools and materials, which have the potential for inappropriate use. Consequently, thorough background checks may minimize potential misconduct.

⁹³ Louis Casiano, "Coronavirus: Who Are Considered 'Essential' Workers?," Fox News, March 23, 2020, <https://www.foxnews.com/us/coronavirus-who-are-considered-essential-workers>.

⁹⁴ Sara Korolevich, "The Complete Guide to Background Checks," *GoodHire* (blog), June 9, 2020, <https://www.goodhire.com/blog/complete-guide-to-background-checks/>.

A thorough background check within the penitentiary setting should include a review of the offender's current and past behavior, misconduct history, associations with security-threat groups (gangs), and participation in any unacceptable activities. An in-depth review of the offender's financial transactions, electronic correspondence (if applicable), and telephone calls can be conducted by agency investigators or intelligence analysts to determine whether any such behavior exists before program placement.

Offenders of vocational-based programs may perform many mental and physical tasks associated with their training. Duties may include driving equipment and lifting heavy objects or require physical stamina, hand-eye coordination, standing for long periods, and repetitive physical labor. Participants should be medically fit and cleared to perform the duties of the program for which they are applying. The medical clearance provides a form of assurance to MDOC for program participation and potential employers that the offender is fit for duty if that is a condition of employment. Candidates may also be subject to random substance-abuse screening as a condition of program participation.

5. Candidate Expectations

Offenders accepted into vocational programs need to maintain standards as set forth by program managers. At a minimum, they must meet adequate time and attendance standards, pass academic and practical assignments, and comport themselves, not only during participation in the program but at all times. A set schedule may prevent offenders from participating in activities extended to other offenders, so special accommodations for visiting, phone use, feeding, and leisure time may be necessary.

Additionally, programs should have daily schedules similar to a work week, and all offenders attending programs should house together to allow for more natural transitions to schedule adjustments. Housing offenders together—a practice used by MDOC's Vocational Village—may help promote a supportive environment, not only from staff but from fellow offenders participating in the program.⁹⁵ Arrangements to feed or “bag”

⁹⁵ Michigan Department of Corrections, “Vocational Village.”

lunches should allow programs to resemble a typical workday and reduce the amount of time spent traversing to dining areas in the correctional facility.

Incentives should be a consideration for offenders expected to maintain higher standards within the correctional setting. Incentives may include after-hours access to recreational areas and equipment, telephones or electronic correspondence, flexible visiting hours, and access to library materials. Other forms of incentives may consist of job readiness training, resume writing and interviewing, and daily living skills training. Offenders should be paid at a higher rate for participation in the program as they are learning a trade and thought of as “skilled” workers. Finally, job placement programs that help offenders find and secure jobs before release should incentivize working hard to succeed.

C. EQUIPMENT AND CLASSROOM SETTING

The cost of equipment and locating the space necessary for vocational programs can be challenging, and program selection may enable or impede the availability to implement desired courses. For example, in 2016, MDOC was able to leverage existing classroom space to develop its first offender-based vocational training center at the Richard A. Handlon Correctional Facility in Ionia, Michigan. Modifications to classrooms occurred, and specialized equipment was purchased to outfit the site.

A second site was brought online at the Parnall Correctional Facility the following year through renovations of existing facility space.⁹⁶ MDOC relocated existing equipment from within the agency and supplemented additional equipment and resources through internal funding sources. A third location identified by MDOC, at the Women’s Huron Valley Correctional Facility in Ypsilanti, Michigan, will require an addition to the existing facility footprint.⁹⁷

Utilizing existing space and reallocating equipment are preferred if possible when considering the implementation of vocational-based training programs. Moreover, doing

⁹⁶ Michigan Department of Corrections.

⁹⁷ State of Michigan, “First Vocational Village Site for Women.”

so should reduce the cost of establishing and maintaining a program when budgets are constrained. Agencies may also seek additional funding through the application of federal grant programs when they are available. However, these can be more difficult to plan for due to the uncertainty of the award. Partnering with non-governmental businesses and potential employers may also offer an opportunity for equipment and resource acquisition. Vocational programs delivered in a secure environment require additional considerations for network accessibility, power sources, and overall security of operations. Therefore, agencies wishing to renovate existing structures should include all stakeholders of the agency in the process, including education, maintenance, information technology, and custody and security to be successful. Finally, agencies may leverage public messaging to provide awareness and bolster community support when attempting to collect resources for programming.

A majority of correctional facilities operate within a secure environment, and the capacity for those housed there is typically taxed. Additionally, correctional settings have a unique set of challenges when it comes to instructing offenders not only academically but also within the classroom setting while presenting hands-on training and application of techniques. Also, the programming for offenders is usually limited to classroom size and instructor availability for desired programs. In addition, the limited classroom space will decrease the number of participants the program can accommodate, and shop or lab areas may need locations separate from the classroom setting. Consequently, instruction within a prison setting injects several unknown factors that differ from non-secure settings. Custodial and security functions can disrupt training sessions, offenders may be transferred or removed for behavioral reasons, and offenders may enter the program at different stages of the curriculum.

D. ONLINE PROGRAMS: MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSES

The use of technology may assist correctional agencies in expanding the opportunity for inmates to advance their knowledge in career and technical training and education. Massive open online courses (MOOCs) are web-based programs that allow for distance learning through video lectures, interactive forums, written documentation, and

examinations to test knowledge.⁹⁸ The word *massive* refers to the number of students who may participate in the program—which is unlimited. Udacity, edX, and Coursera are some of the many MOOCs currently operating online.

MOOCs are delivered online, which requires the user to have the hardware, software, and internet to access pre-recorded or live-streamed videos or presentations. Participants can ask questions in real time and participate in conversations via instant messaging with other students—however, instant messaging between offenders may need to be disabled or monitored for security concerns. One of the most significant benefits of MOOCs is the number of people engaged in the course, which allows participants to share their experiences and knowledge. Students help teach other students during the program, thereby adding content and expertise to the class.

Cost may be one of the most attractive features of MOOCs as some are free of charge and offered from over 900 universities worldwide. Reputable schools such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the University of Michigan, Stanford University, and Harvard are among the institutions of higher learning that embrace the technology.⁹⁹ Most of the programs from universities partner with and host through third-party software platforms such as edX, which was created through a Harvard–MIT partnership that boasts over 20 million users and hundreds of courses.¹⁰⁰ The investments of prestigious institutions in MOOCs to allow access without cost lend content credibility and sustainability.

Correctional agencies can benefit from the flexibility of MOOCs. Because the courses may be self-paced, offenders complete the courses at their leisure, either in their cells or computer classrooms. MOOC content is often previously recorded, which eliminates the need to log in at scheduled times and may be convenient for self-paced study.

⁹⁸ “Massive Open Online Course (MOOC),” Techopedia, last updated April 22, 2013, <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/29260/massive-open-online-course-mooc>.

⁹⁹ “Universities.” Class Central, accessed October 15, 2019. <https://www.classcentral.com/universities>.

¹⁰⁰ “About Us,” edX, accessed August 4, 2020, <https://www.edx.org/about-us>.

MOOCs may be a possibility for correctional agencies wishing to implement and offer the technology as an option to supplement their current education, career, and technical programs. Offenders can test their knowledge through peer-reviewed quizzes, online examinations (which can be graded automatically upon submission), and feedback from the participants. Satisfactory completion of a course may earn the participant a free certificate of completion, a certificate of completion for a fee, or nothing at all other than the knowledge gained through participation.

Benefits of using MOOCs within the correctional environment include the following:

Expanding the reach: Utilizing a MOOC to supplement the current education, career, and technical programs reaches a more significant number of offenders.

Preparing for the classroom: Using MOOCs allows offenders to complete coursework before entering hands-on classroom instruction. Doing so should maintain a pool of qualified classroom candidates and ensure that inmates complete the necessary educational and technical requirements before consuming the limited seats within the classroom.

Self-paced/scheduled programs: MOOCs can be archived and completed at leisure or as determined by the course instructor and allow for flexibility in the event unexpected circumstances arise.

Security: Offenders can complete coursework within a controlled computer lab with minimal oversight, provided the connection is secure. Tablet devices would allow inmates to complete coursework in their cells, reducing movement and staff supervision.

Milestones/certifications: Progression milestones can test knowledge and produce certificates of completion as well as provide a feeling of accomplishment for the student. Certifications may also prepare the offender for state examinations or certifications for licensed mechanics, welders, masons, and carpenters, among others. Coordination with test providers may result in offenders testing while still incarcerated and departing confinement with required credentials for licensing.

Low cost/availability: Most MOOCs are inexpensive or free for students, which may be a factor for agencies operating under budgetary restrictions. Programs could be made available via the intranet within a larger agency to allow access department-wide, not only where there is classroom instruction offered.

Multiple coursework offerings: Countless courses are available, and collaborating with educational providers may result in customized courses.

The use of MOOCs may enhance the success of correctional facilities in securing the education and skills needed to obtain employment for offenders released from confinement to the community. Consequently, securing jobs may reduce the number of offenders who commit new crimes and then are arrested and returned to prison. Additionally, MOOCs may be made available to a much larger population of incarcerated offenders who otherwise might not have access to career and technical education due to classroom availability, the lack of correctional resources, and funding. Permitting offender access to MOOCs to enhance knowledge of technical skills may also instill responsibility and reduce prolonged idleness, which can often lead to harmful behaviors.

E. CLASSROOM AND INSTRUCTOR-DELIVERED PROGRAMS

Classroom and instructor programs, both lecture-based and hands-on applications, are the traditional method of delivery for training within the correctional environment. One of the many benefits of instructor-led training (ILT) is that offenders receive immediate feedback from instructors during the learning sessions. Instructors can also gauge the knowledge of each offender and set the pace of the program accordingly. Additionally, ILT allows program participants to leverage classmates as a knowledge source during and after class has ended, enhancing the learning environment. Furthermore, most skilled-trade jobs require hands-on practical exercises to become proficient at the skill. ILT is the only way that offenders can access the resources needed to practice the skills they have learned.

ILT, when coupled with training resources such as MOOCs, provides an optimal environment for offenders to learn a skilled trade, help others succeed and learn about teamwork, and prepare themselves for life after confinement—not only while learning a profession but also for life. For instance, ILT allows instructors to mimic what a typical day at work might be for offenders and teach them skills to cope with stressful situations such as confrontations with co-workers or supervisors in the workplace. For this reason, many other soft skills—such as interviewing skills, the importance of time and attendance, effective communication, and activities of daily living—can be shared during ILT sessions. Eleanor M. Novek reinforces the importance of the instructor in the learning environment:

“The approach of *jail pedagogy* facilitates creative self-discovery through the development of community, collaborative learning, and critical consciousness.”¹⁰¹

F. BLENDED PROGRAMS

Blended learning environments have advantages for correctional staff and offenders participating in vocational-based training. According to Graham and Dziuban, a blending learning environment “combines face-to-face instruction with technology-mediated instruction.”¹⁰² The blended learning environment may be most beneficial in a correctional setting due to the physical security constraints of providing content in a secure setting. Furthermore, blended learning is usually cost-effective, with minimal investment from the agency. The cost of hourly wages of staff should offset the purchasing of the technology required for blended programming. Consequently, a combination of MOOCs with classroom instruction results in a solid mix of programming. Blended programming maximizes the amount of information delivered to program participants and may familiarize offenders with hardware and software platforms they are likely to use once employed.

Learning how to prioritize, making decisions, resolving conflicts, and communicating are among the skills that MDOC’s partner employers recognize as invaluable for participants entering the workforce. For example, offenders of MDOC’s Vocational Village must participate in several cognitive-based programs that address substance abuse, assaultive behavior, domestic violence, and more. These programs complement trade learning and communication skills at Vocational Village. Furthermore, once offenders complete programming, they mentor those new to the program. Therefore, many of the life skills offenders learn at Vocational Village, combined with cognitive aptitudes, are essential for success in a daily job in the community.

¹⁰¹ Eleanor M. Novek, “Jail Pedagogies: Teaching and Trust in a Maximum-Security Men’s Prison,” *Dialogues in Social Justice: An Adult Education Journal* 2, no. 2 (2017): 38, <https://journals.uncc.edu/dsj/article/view/670>.

¹⁰² Charles R. Graham, and Charles Dziuban, “Blended Learning Environments,” in *Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology*, ed. J. Michael Spector et al. (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2007), 270, Routledge Handbooks Online.

MDOC bolsters offender success through a multi-pronged approach. MDOC's offender success reentry coordinators, institutional parole agents, and educational staff (employment counselors and employment readiness instructors) offer support and parole planning to Vocational Village participants. Additionally, employment counselors help offenders obtain identification, and employment readiness instructors provide classroom instruction for employment soft-skills and resumes. Finally, reentry coordinators and institutional parole agents network with veterans organizations, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity to connect program participants with additional resources.

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V. EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS

Chapter V introduces the importance of external stakeholder support for vocational-based training, including partnerships with licensing agencies for credentials and vital documents to prepare offenders for release. The chapter ends by examining the need for potential employers, businesses, and public organizations to work collaboratively to employ, support, and assist offenders once released.

The implementation of any program will require resources, and for vocational-based applications, there may be many stakeholders willing to offer resource assistance. The type of program will help identify resource needs, but all programs will have baseline needs to be successful. For example, Social Security registration allows someone to apply for employment, collect Social Security benefits, and establish tax information.¹⁰³ Additionally, identification cards verify identity, and employers require applicants to possess a local, state, or federally issued identification card containing a photograph, date of birth, and physically identifying information.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, employers may also require applicants to have job-specific certifications or have initiated the application process to obtain them. For instance, completion of the carpentry program from MDOC's Vocational Village includes certification from the National Center for Construction and Education and Research (NCCER) for carpentry fundamentals and a 10-hour Occupational Safety and Health Administration safety card.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, access to resources is essential for program success.

¹⁰³ "Social Security Number and Card," Social Security Administration, accessed June 7, 2020, <https://www.ssa.gov/ssnumber/>.

¹⁰⁴ "12.0 Acceptable Documents for Verifying Employment Authorization and Identity," U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, last updated April 27, 2020, <https://www.uscis.gov/i-9-central/120-acceptable-documents-verifying-employment-authorization-and-identity>.

¹⁰⁵ Kyle Kaminski and Dan Seal, "Correctional Education and Workforce Development" (presentation, Michigan Department of Corrections, 2019).

A. PARTNERSHIP WITH GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES

Partnering with federal, state, and local agencies can determine a program's success. For this reason, all governmental agencies that are taxpayer-funded often need legislative buy-in for funding and support. Governor Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan lobbied for assistance from the legislative body to support continued financing of MDOC's Vocational Village as an essential step to ensure that offenders released from prison have a path forward.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, since 2009, many agencies have taken advantage of grant funding from the Second Chance Act to implement initiatives to reduce recidivism.¹⁰⁷ In addition to legislative support, agencies that leverage available grant-funded sources at the federal, state, and local levels can supplement internal funding to enhance program capabilities. Moreover, governmental agencies can help bring validity to programs and assist offenders upon release.

1. Licensing Authorities

Depending on the state, many skilled-trade jobs may require licensing, certifications, or credentials for employment or to earn more salary. For example, the nationally accredited American Welding Society offers professional certification to welders who have successfully passed training by certified instructors and satisfactorily completed written and practical welding exercises.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, programs that require their instructors to obtain the credentials necessary to verify certifications may provide greater marketability for graduates. For most construction trades (e.g., carpentry, plumbing, and electrical), the NCCER maintains a national credential registry that tracks the names, training, and certifications of those who complete its programs.¹⁰⁹ For state

¹⁰⁶ Gretchen Whitmer, "Governor: Let's Make Progress on the Things That Matter to Everyone," *Detroit Free Press*, October 7, 2019, <https://www.freep.com/story/opinion/contributors/2019/10/07/whitmer-michigan-budget-gop/3868848002/>.

¹⁰⁷ "Second Chance Act," National Reentry Resource Center, April 2018, https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/July-2018_SCA_factsheet.pdf.

¹⁰⁸ "Professional Certifications," American Welding Society, accessed June 11, 2020, <https://www.aws.org/certification/professionalcertifications>.

¹⁰⁹ "Credentials & Registry," National Center for Construction Education & Research, accessed June 11, 2020, <https://www.nccer.org/workforce-development-programs/credentials-registry>.

certifications, MDOC partners with the Michigan Department of State to facilitate onsite testing of offenders at correctional facilities for commercial driver's licenses and auto repair licensing certificates.¹¹⁰ Consequently, partnering with other agencies is essential to strengthening the resumes of offenders, building program credibility, continually improving training, and maintaining pace with technology.

2. Documents Necessary for Pre-Release from Confinement

To improve the chance of success, pre-release programs should help offenders remove obstacles to securing employment, housing, and finances. To illustrate the collection of essential documents, MDOC partners with the Social Security Administration and Michigan Vital Records to help offenders obtain birth certificates and Social Security cards before release. Additionally, MDOC partners with the Michigan Secretary of State's Office to provide State of Michigan identification cards and driver's licenses (for qualified applicants), resulting in scheduled visits to correctional facilities twice per year to issue licenses for offenders nearing release. The Urban Institute surveyed several state correctional agencies for documents offenders may need before release. The study revealed that offenders often require high school diplomas or GEDs, vocational certifications, insurance cards for medical benefits (if applicable), and medical documentation if follow-ups with healthcare are forthcoming after release.¹¹¹

3. Parole Supervision after Release from Confinement

For offenders who parole from prison (as opposed to offenders who discharge from MDOC jurisdiction), supervision while on parole can assist with a smoother transition and higher chance of success. Considering that offenders from vocational-based programs are part of a specialized population leaving confinement, parole agents should be familiar with the plan developed by educational counselors and the parole board to supervise graduates of the program adequately. Successful parole plans are inclusive and balance between

¹¹⁰ Kaminski and Seal, "Education and Workforce Development."

¹¹¹ Nancy G. La Vigne et al., *Release Planning for Successful Reentry* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, September 2008), <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/32056/411767-Release-Planning-for-Successful-Reentry.PDF>.

providing support and monitoring and enforcing the conditions of parole.¹¹² Training for parole agents emphasizes the need to make regular contact with employers, arrange reporting times for offenders around their work schedules, and ensure that parolees are receiving the appropriate assistance to address potential barriers to employment. Additionally, parole agents are particularly helpful in collecting data associated with graduates of a skilled-trade program. Therefore, as the vocational programs evolve, so should training for parole agents.

B. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Non-governmental organizations can contribute to the success of vocational programs for confined offenders who will eventually work and reside in the communities where these organizations exist.

1. Potential Employers

Collaboration with potential employers can help solidify a pipeline from incarceration to employment. Locating and partnering with employers committed to hiring skilled offenders as part of their workforce will also lend to a program's credibility. For this reason, agencies must familiarize potential employers with the marketable skills earned by program participants. Additionally, agencies must be willing to pivot to meet the needs of employers and should center their skilled-trade programs on the demands of the job market in their state. Therefore, outreach and advertising are essential to staying current with employer needs.

For example, MDOC partners with over 600 employers throughout Michigan and invites them to Vocational Village locations to observe the program and speak with instructors and participants. Employers often provide feedback to program coordinators for continuous program improvement. MDOC also partners with many other employers, including the Michigan Regional Council of Carpenters and Millwrights, Google, local

¹¹² Amy L. Solomon et al., *Putting Public Safety First: 13 Parole Supervision Strategies to Enhance Reentry Outcomes* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, December 2008), <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/32156/411791-Putting-Public-Safety-First--Parole-Supervision-Strategies-to-Enhance-Reentry-Outcomes-Paper-.PDF>.

automotive dealerships, and construction companies. When, for example, Michigan utility provider Detroit Edison (DTE) experienced a shortage of qualified tree trimmers to clear vegetation around power lines, it partnered with MDOC to implement a program to teach the skilled trade to offenders at Vocational Village.¹¹³ Gerry Anderson, the company's executive chairman, states, "At DTE we're passionate about helping returning citizens find employment, enabling them to rebuild their lives. A criminal record shouldn't be a life sentence of unemployment."¹¹⁴

a. Pre-Release Interviews and Job Offers

For participants of vocational-based programs, the ability to interview for and be offered a job before parole or discharge sets them on a path to success. The pressure of trying to find employment just after release from confinement can be a challenge some offenders cannot overcome. As a result, MDOC has established a process whereby employment counselors "blast-email" resumes of offenders nearing release to potential employers that have partnered with Vocational Village. Prospective employers can hire offenders they have monitored during site visits to the Village, or they can elect to meet face-to-face with offenders before parole for an interview. In many cases, employers have opted to issue a written offer of employment or a handshake to finalize the proposal. Either way, offenders often start work the very same week or the next after discharge.

b. Volunteer Instructors

Soliciting assistance of local volunteers from construction and manufacturing companies is a great way to attract potential employers. Additionally, visits from experts in the field will help guide the program to stay current with new techniques and equipment as they relate to each skilled trade. For example, programs such as the Last Mile provide

¹¹³ Robin Runyan, "DTE Announces First-of-Its-Kind Partnership with Parnall Correctional Facility," Empowering Michigan, July 10, 2019, <https://empoweringmichigan.com/dte-announces-first-of-its-kind-partnership-with-parnall-correctional-facility/>.

¹¹⁴ Runyan.

instructors via online training to teach offenders how to write computer code and focus on providing skills for offenders to obtain employment in high-demand computer jobs.¹¹⁵

c. Equipment and Supply Donations

Seeking donations from employers can help offset the costs associated with program finances. For example, the DTE Energy Foundation of Michigan supplied grant funding to the tree-trimming program at MDOC’s Vocational Village to purchase climbing gear and subsequently partnered with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers to provide a climbing structure. DTE says it sees the grant as an investment that helps to reduce recidivism.¹¹⁶ While donations may offset costs, state laws may not allow donations from public businesses. Therefore, agencies should be aware of their policies regarding contributions before accepting assistance.

2. Organizations Willing to Assist Offenders

There are many organizations that correctional agencies may want to build a relationship with to increase the chances of offender success, as recently released offenders may face many challenges while attempting to reintegrate into their communities. These relationships may be critical to ensuring offenders can get the assistance they need to be successful. The help includes access to services such as transportation, housing and food assistance, counseling, mentoring, and support services.

a. Faith-Based Organizations

Religious organizations may bolster offender success not only during incarceration but after release from confinement. Prisoners can connect with religious representatives through volunteer groups offered at correctional facilities and establish a relationship that continues after discharge. For example, Second Wind Mentors of Battle Creek, Michigan, helps parolees transition into society by offering services involving healthcare,

¹¹⁵ “Focus Areas,” Last Mile, accessed June 11, 2020, <https://thelastmile.org/our-work/#reentry>.

¹¹⁶ Runyan, “DTE Announces First-of-Its-Kind Partnership.”

employment, and religious support, and is just one of many organizations in Michigan helping offenders succeed.¹¹⁷

Faith-based organizations that are familiar with local communities can help with access to resources such as transportation and substance-abuse services, as well as provide support as positive role models. Furthermore, faith-based community programs can deter criminal behavior, as evidenced by Baier and Wright.¹¹⁸ Finally, to help define the role of religious organizations and offender release, the U.S. Department of Justice, in collaboration with the Council of State Governments and the U.S. Department of Labor, published a guide for offender reentry partnerships between state and faith-based organizations to improve offender success.¹¹⁹ Reaching out to religious organizations can enhance the chance of successful reintegration of offenders into society.

b. Non-Profit Organizations

Non-profit organizations are another avenue for partnership in offender support and success. For example, MDOC leverages the services of ACT, a non-profit organization providing assessment tests and career readiness assistance, to help participants of Vocational Village determine the best path forward to employment opportunities.¹²⁰ Employment counselors from Vocational Village share the results of the assessment with potential employers. Other organizations, such as Michigan 2-1-1 and Brighter Way, connect released offenders to essential services by helping them, for example, to locate employment and apply for legal documents, job licensing, and housing.¹²¹ These local non-

¹¹⁷ “Second Wind Mentors for Parolees,” CityLinC Ministries, accessed April 18, 2020, <https://www.citylinc.org/second-wind-mentors>.

¹¹⁸ Colin J. Baier and Bradley R. E. Wright, “‘If You Love Me, Keep My Commandments’: A Meta-Analysis of the Effect of Religion on Crime,” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 38, no. 1 (2001): 3–21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427801038001001>.

¹¹⁹ Jamie Yoon and Jessica Nickel, *Reentry Partnerships: A Guide for States and Faith-Based and Community Organizations* (New York: Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2008), 66.

¹²⁰ “ACT WorkKeys Assessments,” ACT, accessed June 9, 2020, <https://www.act.org/content/act/en/workforce-solutions/act-workkeys/act-workkeys-assessments.html>.

¹²¹ “Re-Entry,” Michigan 2-1-1, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.mi211.org/get-help/re-entry>; “Home Page,” Brighter Way, accessed April 19, 2020, <http://abrighterway.org/>.

profit organizations assist individuals with stabilizing their lives after release from jail or prison and typically make contact with parole agents before an inmate is released.

c. *Volunteer Organizations*

Partnering with volunteer organizations that are willing to help released offenders provides another avenue for community support and involvement for offender success. Agencies such as the Volunteers of America understand the importance of supporting those released from correctional facilities. As part of its services, Volunteers of America

help[s] offenders successfully transition from prison to a productive life in the community and . . . rehabilitate[s] adult offenders and steer[s] youth to set new, positive directions for their lives. [Its] services include halfway houses and work-release programs, day reporting, diversion and pre-trial services, residential treatment, family supports, and dispute resolution and mediation services.¹²²

Community volunteer organizations should be part of the stakeholder assemblage for offender success.

C. *ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS*

Seeking the participation of academic institutions may be useful in the development of programming. Institutions of higher learning will be especially helpful in developing classroom or electronic online course materials. Universities may have MOOCs available for vocational programs, and those universities might assist with curriculum development for new MOOCs. For example, Siena Heights University in Adrian, Michigan, offers skilled-trade technological programs, which may be useful when developing classroom or self-study materials for offenders.¹²³ Additionally, partnering with secondary education programs may also assist offenders interested in a skilled-trade field with completing the prerequisites for vocational training as well as the minimum requirements to apply for

¹²² “Correctional Re-Entry Services,” Volunteers of America, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.waw.voaok.org/correctional-re-entry-services>.

¹²³ “Bachelor of Applied Science,” Siena Heights University, accessed June 6, 2020, <https://sienaheights.edu/Academics/Bachelor-of-Applied-Science>.

employment after release. Agency educational staff may also apply for federal grant funding to assist with the cost implementation of such programs.

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VI. CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS

The purpose of this thesis is to guide and assist agencies by presenting a model and multiple options to consider when drafting a proposal or implementing such a training program for offenders. The model is conceptual and combines best practices of MDOC's Vocational Village and similar training programs as well as additional recommendations for development.

Each agency that may want to consider vocational-based programming as an opportunity to help reduce recidivism, promote offender success, and inspire safer communities should have access to information to get them started. Consequently, I have developed a conceptual "vocational-based program" model that provides options for consideration, and applicability to interested agencies. The purpose of the model is to provide a generalized and flexible example for agencies to insert research content as they see fit. Information will vary for all agencies, and the model allows for customization as appropriate.

The adoption of any new program requires intentional effort and action, and there will be barriers to overcome throughout the development and implementation process. Therefore, identifying resources and developing procedures for a vocational-based offender program are essential components, and many considerations must be made and actions taken before and after these components are put in place to ensure success and sustainability. The following serves as a broad framework to provide actionable steps for developing and implementing a vocational offender program that delivers desirable outcomes for the organization, the offenders who benefit from the program, external partners and stakeholders, and the public. The framework consists of multiple components that work together. For this reason, it is imperative to recognize the interdependence and relationship between components and consider how development or changes to one potentially affects the others.

Presenting executive and senior leaders with a clear and concise proposal with data-supported research is essential to gaining early buy-in and commitment. Components of

this model can assist with developing the initial plan for leadership (see Figure 7). The depth and breadth of each component of the initial proposal should be tailored to the organization’s current status and desired outcomes. To the extent practical, an agency should emphasize the expected benefits including potential savings, improved performance results, and other factors critical to the organization and the community.

Vocational-Based Program Conceptual Model

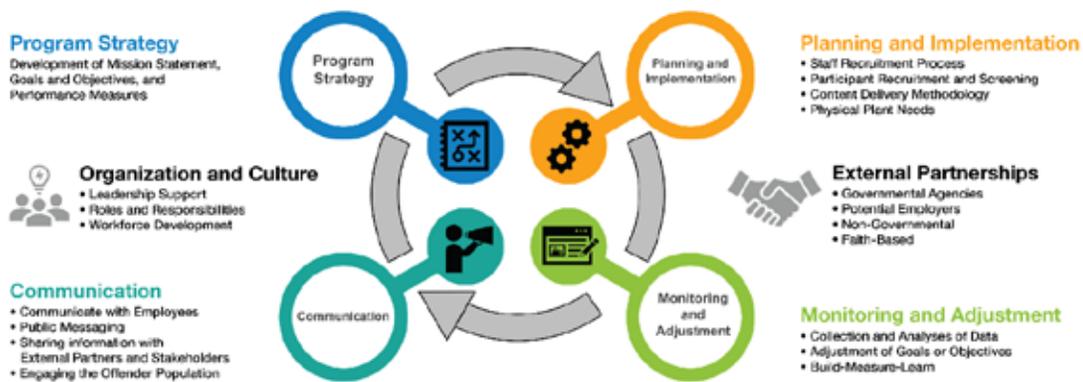


Figure 7. Vocational-Based Conceptual Model

A. ORGANIZATION AND CULTURE

Organizational culture affects all other components of the framework and must be a consideration in the development of the program and supporting processes for successful implementation. Changing the culture is one of the most difficult undertakings of any organization, private or public. As previously discussed, this can be especially challenging in a correctional setting where the primary focus is foremost on safety and security, with programming being a secondary objective. The shift in mindset regarding the benefits of programs intended to reduce recidivism and prepare offenders for a successful transition to society is itself a form of maintaining long-term safety and security.

1. Leadership Support

Executive and senior leaders have a vital role in implementing or modifying an existing program. Leadership input will help assess organizational readiness, guide strategy development, and monitor program outcomes. Additionally, it is recommended that leadership enlist managers and front-line workers to help design and develop the program. Furthermore, leadership will have a significant role in fostering partnerships necessary for the successful implementation of a vocational-based program.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

Correctional organizations vary in how they approach organizational structure, roles, and responsibilities. The process will take time and intentional effort, and leadership will need to be both supportive and clear about expectations. An evaluation of current roles and responsibilities early in the development process should help with reallocating resources and redefining roles. Additionally, positions that have a direct connection to the program should be identified and brought into the development process first. The roles and responsibilities of operational positions should be evaluated and refined as needed as the program matures. As job duties may change, it is critical for staff impacted by changes to the structure, position, or responsibility to hear directly from leadership before adjustments occur. Some of those affected will be early adopters and welcome change; others may resist and need guidance and support to adapt.

3. Workforce Development

Implementing a new program, or substantially changing an existing program, could require knowledge and skills that staff may not currently have. The organization should search for the right individuals with the right skills for a successful program. Another consideration should be those who possess the right skills but who may not utilize them in their current positions. Additionally, an assessment of existing staff skills and those needed for program success may identify gaps in the development of employee training. Significant gaps may need prioritization to address the most critical needs first while simultaneously implementing the program. Finally, as the program matures, there should be a regular evaluation of the knowledge and skills needed to advance to the next level,

ensuring employee curricula evolve to stay at the forefront of the respective profession and program needs.

B. EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS

As previously discussed, offenders released from a correctional facility are most successful when their reentry to society has a strong foundation of family and community support. There is also a correlation between an offender's readiness for reentry and one's success after released. Therefore, a significant factor in success is to have a marketable skill set to obtain employment. While a vocational-based program may provide an offender with knowledge, skills, and abilities beyond vocational training, the focus of this component is on the specific partnerships necessary to bolster successful offender reintegration.

As discussed in Chapter V, there are many considerations and opportunities for external stakeholder partnerships with, for example, national, state, and local agencies to secure training credentials, driver's licenses, and vital documents for offenders before release and governmental assistance as appropriate after release. Additionally, partnering with potential employers—willing to commit by supporting the program through training, allocating resources, and employing offenders after release—is crucial. Other entities, such as faith-based organizations and non-governmental associations, may be willing to assist offenders with housing, food, and transportation.

External partnerships affect all other components of the framework. Each partner has a different level of commitment and contribution, and it is essential to develop a clear understanding of what role the partner is interested in playing at the start of the relationship. The organization should seek a broad spectrum of partners to leverage the organization's and partnership's strengths to fill program gaps and maximize opportunities. Furthermore, external partners should be brought into program development discussions as early as possible to help inform correctional facility leaders, and program decision-makers develop the strategic direction and best practices from an external perspective. The development of program goals, objectives, performance measures, and strategies should include input from

partners as they have direct knowledge of the trades industry, regional job market, and the skills they are seeking from prospective employees.

Finally, evaluating program success and advancing program maturity will rely on continuing collaboration between agency leadership, program managers, and external partnerships. For example, external partners can contribute to program monitoring, reporting, and evaluation by committing to provide essential data and feedback should they hire an individual upon release. Moreover, they can contribute by keeping the program informed of changes in the employment market, industry needs, and changing skill sets required for successful and sustainable employment in a specific trade.

C. PROGRAM STRATEGY

The program strategy should include a well-defined mission, goals, objectives, and performance measures to monitor progress. Strategic direction is the foundation from which the entire program will be developed and requires clear, concise language describing the desired future state of the program and expected outcomes.

Together, the mission, goals, objectives, and measures communicate to all stakeholders, internally and externally, where the agency is going and how it intends to get there. Within the organization, leaders and program managers will use the strategic framework to reshape the culture; identify, prioritize, and commit resources; develop roles and responsibilities; and evaluate and communicate progress. Additionally, the strategy can help market the program to gain partnership and stakeholder interest and support. Finally, the strategy also helps market the program to the offender population to change the culture within the system and promote positive behavior through reward and opportunity.

Developing and maintaining a sound strategy takes a commitment of time and effort. Before developing the strategy document, the organization should carefully consider what the program is to achieve and what is considered program success. Additionally, the definition of program success will evolve and should be evaluated on a regularly scheduled basis to maximize the program's potential. It is essential to start with a standard definition for each component of the strategy, as follows:

1. Mission Statement

A mission statement is a concise declaration of core purpose. The mission serves as a compass that provides the direction, not the destination—which is never fully realized. The mission statement should be short, specific, and easy to communicate and inspire change.

2. Goals and Objectives

Goals are broad statements that articulate in clear, concise terms the desired program outcomes. Goals should not contain jargon and should be limited to the “vital few”—those most critical to moving the program toward its mission. Those responsible for implementing the program need to understand the goals they are executing and that narrowing goals to the vital few improves the probability of accomplishing them.

Objectives are specific, measurable statements that translate broad goal statements to action by breaking each goal down to desired outcomes. Objectives should be written in clear, concise language, start with action verbs, and translate to performance measures with targets or preferred trends. Drafting objectives using specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) principles, coupled with key performance measures and targets (as defined below), become SMART objectives (see Figure 8). Goals and objectives together are the building blocks that prioritize strategies and guide investments.

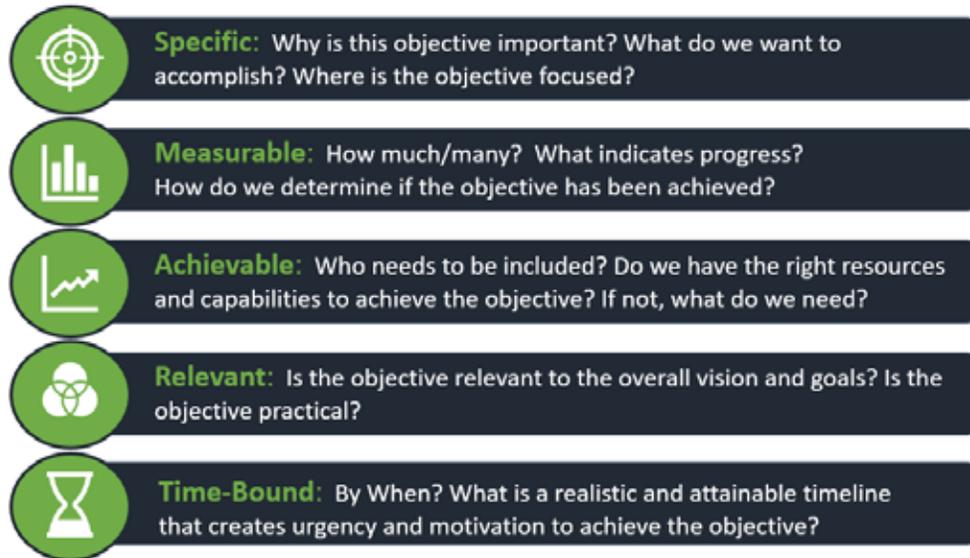


Figure 8. SMART Principles for Objectives¹²⁴

3. Performance Measures

Performance measures are based on data and used to determine whether the agency is achieving its objectives and whether it is making progress toward program goals. Performance measures should be carefully selected, focused on the vital few that have the strongest correlation with advancing progress toward achieving established goals. Measuring everything just because the data are available is a waste of limited resources and can dilute the decision-making process. Furthermore, data availability may affect the selection of measures. Thus, it is best to err on the side of caution when choosing what to measure to ensure criteria are not selected because there are abundant data.

D. PROGRAM PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

As discussed in Chapter IV, there can be many challenges associated with specialized offender programming. The selection of staff and candidates, environmental security concerns, and content delivery are some issues for consideration. Programming within secure correctional environments may be challenging but not impossible.

¹²⁴ Adapted from “S.M.A.R.T. Objectives,” Wayne State University, accessed August 16, 2020, <https://hr.wayne.edu/leads/phase1/smart-objectives>.

1. Staff and Candidate Selection

The recruitment and selection of staff to develop and implement a program play a crucial role in the success of the program and, more importantly, the success of program participants. Equally important is having a protocol for screening and selecting offender participants.

The role of instructors is to interact with offenders, teach them the trade skills necessary to obtain employment, and show them how to cope with potential issues that may occur on the job. The role should not be limited to expertise in their field of study; instructors must also mentor and counsel offenders to enhance their chances of success in reintegrating with society.

The interview and selection process of instructors should include a presentation of their understanding of program objectives and the agency's vision of offender success. Additionally, instructors will be working in a correctional facility and need to understand custody and security practices within a secure confinement location. Furthermore, they must be effective communicators and maintain flexibility while reinforcing expectations in a challenging environment. Instructor selection can support program success or cause program problems—the establishment of a sound process should help determine the best candidates.

The program participant selection process is equally important to program success. Constrained resources will only support a limited number of participants. Thus, application and screening processes should ensure the right offenders gain access to programs that are best suited for *their* success. While the overall objective is to reduce recidivism by teaching offenders a sought-after job skill, each offender needs screening and evaluation for eligibility and programming. Therefore, candidate interviews may be essential, as outlined in Chapter IV.

Incorporating employment counselors into a program may be essential to enhancing program success. Counselors should discuss job interest and begin conducting assessments with offenders, targeting offenders that are two to four years from parole. Additionally, counselors should share data on employment opportunities and predicted employment

openings in the county where the offender is paroled. Finally, the offender and the counselor should discuss and choose trades of interest to the offender.

Last, conducting background checks for security and medical information may be preferred to ensure offenders are physically fit to participate in programming and are unlikely to engage in inappropriate behavior. Consequently, thorough background checks may minimize potential misconduct and increase success. Successful background checks conducted during confinement may ensure subsequent employer background checks do not hinder employability.

2. Content Delivery Methodologies

First and foremost, the priority in any correctional setting is to maintain the security and safety of the facility, employees, visitors, and offenders. Implementing a vocational program presents additional challenges as participants will have access to dangerous tools and equipment required for course delivery. Also, content delivery may rely on physical plant changes including facility construction and information technology projects, such as network access, to support course content and delivery.

The cost of equipment and locating the space necessary can be challenging and may impede the ability to implement some courses. If possible, agencies should take advantage of existing classroom space to develop training locations, which may decrease the initial investment costs. Recommending modifications to areas within facilities may be less expensive and allow additional funding for program equipment purchases. As a result, class space may be limited for desired programs and require moving shop or lab areas to separate locations from the classroom setting. Consequently, instruction within a prison setting injects several unknown factors that differ from non-secure settings.

There are a few options for content delivery once instructors and locations are determined. First, through the use of MOOCs, as described in Chapter IV, offenders can study at their own pace in their housing units and familiarize themselves with program content or complete work as assigned.

The second option is the classroom and instructor-led program—the traditional method of delivery for training within the correctional environment—and includes both lecture-based and hands-on applications. Additionally, ILT allows program participants to leverage classmates as a knowledge source in and outside the classroom, thus enhancing the learning environment. Furthermore, most trade jobs require practical hands-on exercises to become proficient at the skill. ILT is the only way to allow offenders access to the resources needed to practice the skills they have learned.

Lastly, the blended learning environment combines “face-to-face instruction with technology-mediated instruction.”¹²⁵ The blended learning environment may be most beneficial to a correctional setting due to the physical security constraints associated with providing content within a secure setting. Blended programming maximizes the amount of information delivered to program participants and may also familiarize offenders with hardware and software platforms they are likely to use once employed.

E. MONITORING AND ADJUSTMENT

As the vocational-based program begins its actual operations, the collection and management of data will help with continuous program improvements and determine whether the program is achieving its desired goals. Applying the concept of build-measure-learn should help identify areas where development can occur quickly.¹²⁶ Once gaps are identified, there may be new goals, objectives, strategies, and targets to create or modify.

F. COMMUNICATION

Effective communication, both internally and externally, can bolster program support and resource allocations, as well as share the direction and success of the program. Additionally, openly engaging stakeholders and sharing the mission, goals, objectives, challenges, and achievements of the program will encourage input and feedback while ensuring transparency.

¹²⁵ Graham and Dziuban, “Blended Learning Environments.”

¹²⁶ “Methodology,” Lean Startup, accessed July 15, 2020, <http://theleanstartup.com/principles>.

Quality messaging to the offender population about the program will attract those most interested and willing to commit to their success, thereby promoting the success of the program. Offenders may then be ambassadors of the program while incarcerated and after release, encouraging additional stakeholder support. Employers with a positive experience with program graduates are likely to hire additional graduates or communicate their experience with other employers.

At a time when criminal justice reform is front and center in the minds of both policymakers and citizens, public messaging should play a crucial role in support of the program. For example, agencies might garner support from a political perspective—opening additional opportunities for financial assistance—or commitments from governmental and non-governmental organizations to assist.

Last, communicating with employees of the agency about the program should encourage and reinforce the cultural change for enhanced offender programming. The entire agency plays a role in the success of the program and should celebrate that success when appropriate.

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VII. CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the use of vocational-based training applied to individuals housed within prisons to discover components for the construction of a conceptual model. The research also included best practices and recommendations for model components.

The research for this thesis revealed there was a lack of information available for correctional agencies interested in developing vocational and skilled-trade programs. Therefore, agencies wishing to leverage vocational-based programming to better prepare offenders for release and to reduce the number of offenders returning to prison would experience the heavy burden of developing a program from scratch.

The purpose of this thesis was to guide and assist agencies by presenting a model and multiple options to consider when drafting a proposal or implementing such a program. The resulting model is conceptual and combines best practices of MDOC's Vocational Village and similar training programs as well as additional recommendations to consider during development.

A. DISCUSSION

The United States incarcerates more people than any other country in the world—nearly 1.5 million.¹²⁷ Consequently, approximately 650,000 offenders are released into U.S. communities after their prison sentences each year.¹²⁸ Unfortunately, many of those offenders ultimately return to prison, which results in a U.S. recidivism rate of approximately 44 percent.¹²⁹

Offenders can face many significant challenges while attempting to reintegrate into society after incarceration. Even after serving their sentences, offenders often carry the stigma of a felony record and the fact that they served time in prison. Consequently, this

¹²⁷ E. Ann Carson, *Prisoners in 2018*, Bulletin NCJ 253516 (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, April 2020), <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p18.pdf>.

¹²⁸ Department of Justice, "Prisoners and Prisoner Re-Entry."

¹²⁹ "Measuring Recidivism," National Institute of Justice, accessed June 4, 2020, <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/measuring-recidivism>.

stigma may hurt their ability to secure housing and other essential needs for daily living.¹³⁰ Furthermore, felony convictions can make it very difficult to apply for and obtain good-paying jobs for offenders, which can result in many offenders ending up in low-skill, low-paying jobs with little to no promotional opportunities.

Newly released offenders may encounter many barriers to employability when searching for a job. For example, various potential employers may be hesitant to hire ex-offenders, or offenders are unable to secure the necessary credentials for employment as a result of the felony conviction. Consequently, it can become a vicious cycle of despair for offenders.

Vocational Village is helping to reduce obstacles to employment for offenders released from MDOC. The agency is using a combination of collaboration with potential employers, training and certification for in-demand jobs, and post-release support mechanisms as outlined in this thesis. MDOC and former Governor Rick Snyder are leading by example by signing a bill to allow offenders eligibility to work within MDOC.¹³¹ The Michigan Legislature is also working on criminal justice reforms to allow for expanded expungement of criminal records so that offenders secure employment and become successful contributing members of society.¹³²

Offenders who return to confinement bring more costs to an already enormous budget for incarceration.¹³³ MDOC alone has an annual operating budget of over \$2 billion.¹³⁴ Additionally, MDOC has housed over 39,000 offenders and released over 10,400

¹³⁰ Melissa Li, "From Prisons to Communities: Confronting Re-Entry Challenges and Social Inequality," *SES Indicator*, March 2018, <https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/indicator/2018/03/prisons-to-communities>.

¹³¹ "Gov. Snyder Signs Bill to Allow Former Felons to Work at Dept. of Corrections," ABC 7 Detroit, December 7, 2017, <https://www.wxyz.com/news/gov-snyder-signs-bill-to-allow-former-felons-to-work-at-dept-of-corrections>.

¹³² Angie Jackson, "Michigan Bills Would Make More Ex-Offenders Eligible to Have Criminal Records Expunged," *Detroit Free Press*, September 9, 2019, <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2019/09/09/michigan-expungement-laws-reform/2223792001/>.

¹³³ "The Economic Burden of Incarceration in the U.S (2016)," National Institute of Corrections, accessed August 16, 2020, <https://nicic.gov/economic-burden-incarceration-us-2016>.

¹³⁴ "FY 2020-2021 Corrections Budget," Michigan Senate Fiscal Agency, accessed June 7, 2020, https://www.senate.michigan.gov/sfa/departments/highlightsheet/hicor_web.pdf.

into Michigan communities.¹³⁵ The state is trying to offset the cost to taxpayers. Michigan’s recidivism rate has been declining over the last few years and is down to 26.7 percent, among the 10 lowest recidivism rates in the United States.¹³⁶ MDOC Director Heidi Washington believes the reduction is in part a result of Michigan’s Offender Success program, which includes vocational-based training for offenders before reintegrating into society.¹³⁷ While there is no single silver bullet for reducing offender recidivism rates, vocational-based programming delivered during confinement shows promising results when coupled with existing reintegration strategies.

Correctional agencies that are interested in the development and implementation of a vocational-based training program have many potential factors to consider. For example, they should consider assessing and selecting candidates early in confinement, monitoring offenders participating in programs, assisting released offenders in securing employment, and evaluating the process to ensure a high level of offender success. Additionally, agencies ought to confirm that skilled-trade training meets current technologies and that the program’s curriculum matches the needs of local job markets. Furthermore, preparing prisoners for employment and release—by assisting with securing personal documents, providing employment certifications, and through life coaching and mentoring—is a must. Finally, developing specially trained parole agents eases reintegration into a productive and successful lifestyle.

Recidivism is a nationwide issue, and state-level corrections agencies are most adept at attacking the problem. State correctional agencies know their local stakeholders and job markets to establish the programs needed for in-demand jobs. States like Michigan are beginning to produce promising results for both offenders and communities for crime reduction and offender success. Embracing the concept of offender success as a model that

¹³⁵ Michigan Department of Corrections, *2017 Statistical Report* (Lansing: Michigan Department of Corrections, 2019), https://www.michigan.gov/documents/corrections/MDOC_2017_Statistical_Report_644556_7.pdf.

¹³⁶ “Recidivism Rates by State 2020,” World Population Review, accessed June 4, 2020, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/states/recidivism-rates-by-state/>.

¹³⁷ Heidi Washington, “Column: State’s Prison Recidivism Rate Is Improving,” *Detroit News*, February 19, 2018, <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/opinion/2018/02/19/progress-state-recidivism-rate/110609456/>.

includes skilled trades and employment upon release will require an up-front investment but likely result in long-term reductions to recidivism and costs to taxpayers. Reducing the number of individuals returning to prison minimizes the amount of crime and number of victims, which result in safer communities and strengthening of homeland security.

B. LIMITATIONS

The model has limitations. Research on the topic of establishing vocational programs within correctional settings is limited. While many work programs exist in correctional agencies, limited program models provide offenders with national and state-level credentials, employment counseling, job interviews, potential offers before release, and individual guidance for graduates. Within the model are evidence-based strategies that have been and are currently in use within correctional agencies—while other parts of the model are recommendations that agencies may opt to implement.

(1) Not Field-Tested

The model is conceptual and is not thoroughly field-tested. Components of the model identified within this thesis work for MDOC and other agencies, however not entirely. Nevertheless, implementation of the model would provide the opportunity for field testing.

(2) State of Michigan Data

The majority of research data reviewed for this thesis originate from the local knowledge case study of MDOC's Vocational Village program. Many other correctional agencies have contacted or visited Michigan to learn what makes the program work and how MDOC established it. The Village appears to be fruitful for Michigan. Consequently, many of the conceptual vocational-based model components originated from Vocational Village.

Additionally, the study included an evaluation for savings and investment for MDOC; the advice is for each agency to complete an assessment independently to determine cost-effectiveness. An approach to consider is the social return on investment,

which examines not only the financial impact but also the value of what the agency will provide to stakeholders not measured using profit margins.¹³⁸

C. FUTURE RESEARCH

This research has highlighted the need for continuous process improvement in vocational-based program models. MDOC's Vocational Village program data indicate the success of offenders who participate in the program based on the lower level of recidivism rates compared to offenders not participating in the program. However, there may be additional areas to research that have yet to be defined, which may strengthen the argument for vocational-based offender programs.

(1) Validate Use of Model Components

The use of the conceptual model for vocational-based programs needs validation. Successful models, best practices, and recommendations for improvement require documentation and dissemination among correctional agencies. The Vocational Village program shares with others upon request; however, there is no standard documentation defining how the program was established and operated.

(2) Multiple-Site Studies

Very few vocational-based programs exist in the United States, and other countries provide certifications for incarcerated offenders and pre-release offers of employment for program participants. Therefore, multiple-site research would be useful to determine how various job markets, geographic locations, economic levels, unemployment rates, and differing models affect recidivism and offender success.

(3) Long-Term Studies

As mentioned, very few correctional agencies operate vocational-based programs. Programs such as Vocational Village are in early phases of implementation and have not been in place long enough to determine the effectiveness of programming. Therefore, long-

¹³⁸ "What Is Social Return on Investment?," Community Services Analysis, accessed June 7, 2020, <http://www.csaco.org/what-is-social-return-on-investment-.html>.

term examinations would help identify best practices and possible development of a universal model for use by correctional agencies.

APPENDIX A. MDOC DEFINITIONS

Active Paroles: Vocational Village graduates paroled from an MDOC currently under MDOC supervision by a parole agent in the community.

Employment Rate: Full-time employment rate of Vocational Village graduates who are on active parole status.

Overall Employment Rate: Full-time employment rate of Vocational Village graduates who are on active parole status or discharged from parole.

Partnering Employers: Employers who have partnered with MDOC and are considering the employment of MDOC returning citizens. These employers support the notion of giving an individual a second chance as they re-enter the community from confinement and notify MDOC when they have vacant positions available.

Pre-Release Job Offer: Offer of employment to Vocational Village graduates from an MDOC-partnering employer before the graduate's parole release. Offers must include a start date, starting hourly wage starting, and an address for the graduate to report to work on one's scheduled first day.

Recidivism Rate: a return to prison for a technical parole violation or a new court-imposed sentence occurring within three years of release from prison to parole.

- Only Michigan prisoners paroled to Michigan counties are within the dataset.
- Offenders paroled to Michigan from other states or Michigan offenders released to other states are exempt from the data.
- Offenders discharged to custody to another law enforcement agency are removed from the data.
- Deceased offenders within the three-year timeframe who did not return to confinement are exempt from the data.
- Offenders returning as a technical violator who also received a new sentence within three years of parole are considered a new sentence.

SSI/SSDI: Vocational Village graduates who completed the program but are unemployed because they are receiving Social Security insurance or Social Security disability insurance.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ "Benefits for People with Disabilities," Social Security Administration, accessed May 10, 2020, <https://www.ssa.gov/disability/>.

Successful Parole Discharges: Vocational Village graduates paroled from an MDOC facility who have satisfied all parole requirements and are no longer under MDOC jurisdiction.

Total Number of Returns: The cumulative number of Vocational Village graduates who have returned to MDOC prison for a technical parole violation or a new court-imposed sentence at any time after parole from the Vocational Village program.

Total Number of Students on Active Parole: The cumulative number of Vocational Village graduates currently under MDOC supervision by a parole agent in the community.

Total Number of Students Paroled: The cumulative number of Vocational Village graduates who have paroled from MDOC prison facilities.

Vocational Village Recidivism Rate: The recidivism rate for Vocational Village graduates for a technical parole violation or a new court-imposed sentence at any time after completing the Vocational Village program.

APPENDIX B. PROGRAM MEASUREMENT AND METRICS

Annual Overall Program Completion Percentage: Capturing how many offenders completed the program annually once accepted.

Annual Program Completion by Specific Trade

Candidate Pool: Captures the number of offenders who have applied and are eligible for the program but are awaiting a vacancy to attend.

Employer Partnership Commitments: Captures the name and number of employers committed to offender success as a partner and potential employer of program graduates.

Employment Rate: The number of offenders currently maintaining employment and monitored for up to three years after program completion.

Enrollment by Trade: Captures the current number of candidates enrolled in each program.

Monthly Overall Program Completion Percentage: Capturing how many offenders completed the program monthly once accepted.

Monthly Program Capacity and Vacancy Rate: Captures the total number of seats available and occupied.

Monthly Program Completion by Specific Trade

Overall Total of Program Graduates Paroled

Program Graduates Currently on Parole Status

Pre-Release Job Offers: Potential employers agree to conditions of employment with an offender of the program after release.

Return-to-Prison Rate: Captures how many offenders return to prison after completion of the program for a period of up to three years (the recidivism rate).

Total Number of Returns: Captures the total number of program graduates who return to prison within three years.

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