

Checklist of Practices for Effective Reentry

Reentry planning and programming are critically important to individuals leaving incarceration and to the communities to which they return. Departments of correction (DOCs) and releasing agencies and their government and community partners must establish effective reentry practices to ensure the greatest possible reentry success for all involved. Effective reentry requires preparation, programs, and services that are appropriate and effective in meeting individuals' criminogenic and related needs and therefore reduce the likelihood of recidivism. Agencies should use validated tools to assess individuals' risk and needs, and match them to program settings and approaches based on the results as well as the personality and learning style of the individual.

DOCs and releasing agencies cannot facilitate reentry without support. They must engage partners to comprehensively support individuals and communities, and ensure a continuum of services supports all returning individuals. The Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs' Bureau of Justice Assistance administers Second Chance Act (SCA) programs to support State, local, and Native American Tribal governments and nonprofit organizations to accomplish these goals. Five agencies and organizations are model recipients of SCA grants. Their initiatives include practices essential to successful reentry. This checklist presents a synthesis of the 14 practices that they and their partners identify as critical to reentry.

SCA Grant-Supported Programs

- **Kansas Department of Corrections**
- **Louisiana Department of Corrections**
- **Insight Garden Program** (*in partnership with California State Prison System*)
- **Northeast Kentucky Reentry Program** (*in partnership with Rowan County Detention Center*)
- **Family Pathfinders** (*in partnership with Tarrant County Jail, Texas*)

1. **Develop a reentry plan.** Reentry plans that are developed and finalized within the last 120–180 days of an incarceration period and are agreed upon by all parties prior to release may serve as a “**road map.**” The plan should **feature goals and action steps**, including many of the other items on this checklist. The reentry plans, based on **assessed needs**, are individualized and incorporate **substantial input from the returning individual**. Thorough development of the reentry plan can lead to successful reentry.

Exemplar: Kansas Department of Corrections (KDOC)

Case managers work closely with participants to create an **intensive reentry case management plan** to help prepare individuals to return to the community. The plan identifies both criminogenic needs and reentry needs/barriers, and it outlines specific strategies (e.g., interventions and services) to address them. While concurrently engaging in intensive reentry intervention sessions, individuals meet with the case manager each week to check in, review skills learned in intervention sessions, build motivation, and identify skills to practice. The case management plan is routinely updated to facilitate an effective transfer to community supervision upon release.

(Note: KDOC also addresses practices 4, 6, 10, 12, and 13.)

Exemplar: Louisiana Department of Corrections (LDOC)

LDOC established regional reentry centers to address as many barriers to reentry as possible prior to release. LDOC has chosen a regional approach because more than half of the individuals serving a DOC sentence are distributed across more than 100 local jails. This population serves an **average of 18 months of incarceration** and makes up about 80 percent of LDOC releases annually. Because of their relatively small size, it is difficult for individual local jails to provide comprehensive and evidence-based services and interventions. Instead, regional reentry centers and State institutions develop **reentry accountability plans (ReAPs)** prior to release with input and collaboration from the returning individual. The ReAP addresses reentry needs and barriers through actionable and measurable steps. The ReAP addresses criminogenic needs based on a valid risk and needs assessment. Services and interventions to address these needs are in place regionally. Finally, the ReAP identifies relevant prerelease coursework to be completed by the returning individual.

(Note: LDOC also addresses practices 2, 6, 9, 12, and 13.)

2. **Provide legal discharge information.** Discharging institutions must provide individuals leaving incarceration with **legal paperwork** as proof that they indeed are released and must inform those individuals of any **outstanding legal issues** they are facing that may have implications for their release. Recognizing and dealing with any legal issues can prevent a lack of understanding that might be a roadblock to successful reentry.

Exemplar: Louisiana Department of Corrections

LDOC established **Transition Document Envelopes (TDEs)** that collect the individualized ReAP, identification documents, education and skills training certifications, release documents, and any other important legal documents. LDOC staff or a local jail staff member trained by LDOC meets with each individual who is preparing to reenter the community while they are still incarcerated to read and explain the release documents and postrelease supervision responsibilities. The individual who is incarcerated must acknowledge receipt of the documents, which are then placed in the TDE and given to the individual upon release. LDOC and the Division of Probation and Parole keep copies of the release documents. The individual may request additional copies of these documents from the DOC at any time.

Exemplar: Insight Garden Program (IGP)

IGP works to ensure that a lack of understanding does not stand in the way of a successful transition to the community for individuals leaving incarceration. The program employs many individuals who were formerly incarcerated to accomplish that goal. IGP staff members review discharge paperwork with individuals leaving incarceration to ensure special conditions and requirements are understood, especially those conditions **that may lead to reincarceration if not followed**. IGP has guided participants to comply with terms of release and subsequent community supervision, including through complex legal requirements (such as a requirement to enroll in the sex offender registry) or for mandatory program participation, such as substance use or mental health treatment.

(Note: IGP also addresses practices 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 14.)

3. **Create a “welcome to the community” experience.** A “welcome to the community” experience is **structured, supportive, and proactive** in avoiding risks for reoffending. These guided experiences may involve having a responsible person **pick up the individual at the facility** and **“walk with them” through the first hours (and even days) after release**. This reentry practice may ensure the returning individual has **clothes** that fit and do not look like prison-issued clothing, may provide access to the **cash** the returning individual had in their account at the facility (so they do not have to find a way to cash a check or pay fees to use a debit card), and may supply hygiene items and food to meet immediate **basic needs**.

Exemplar: Northeast Kentucky Reentry Program

Strong rapport-building supports program participants as they return to the community. Prior to release, reentry plan development addresses the participant’s basic needs, including a safe and sober place to live as

well as clothes to wear out the door. Program staff pick up participants after they are released from the jail and bring them to the reentry office where they begin **intensive case management** services. These services include obtaining identification, needed housing, employment, a phone, clothing, and food, as well as enrolling in entitlement benefits and scheduling doctor and dental appointments. Instead of worrying about where they will sleep, whether they have food to eat, or how will they get a job, participants can focus on their recovery and building a support system that will help them transition into a life that is free of addiction and criminal behaviors.

(Note: Northeast Kentucky Reentry Program also addresses practices 10, 11, and 12.)

Exemplar: Insight Garden Program

The IGP reentry program is an extension of the 48-week curriculum that participants have engaged in while in custody. They are **greeted at the gate by a familiar face**, given a reentry resource sheet customized to their goals and needs, and taken to a welcome home meal and to shop for reentry clothes. Most importantly, they are provided a prepaid cell phone that they can use to apply for jobs, access public benefits, and attend weekly check in circles via Zoom. IGP often coordinates with families to meet participants at the time of release and to receive an explanation of the reentry support that is provided for family members and to learn about the opportunities that are available through various partners for continued education or workforce development programs.

4. **Connect with community supervision agent.** If the returning individual will be on probation or parole, the DOC and releasing agencies should **establish a connection with the supervising officer**. Ideally, this will begin prior to release. The returning individual will receive the **probation or parole officer's contact information** and the steps they need to take immediately, such as **paying fees** and **meeting timelines**. Establishing these relationships will prevent confusion at the time of release and clearly define the role of the community supervision agent prior to the individual's return to the community.

Exemplar: Kansas Department of Corrections

After assignment to the program, the first action is to connect the resident's supervising parole officer to the release planning process. The parole office, as a member of the case planning team, participates in **prerelease multidisciplinary calls, virtual meetings, and/or in-person meetings** conducted to better address assessed needs. This connection assists in building trust and rapport prior to release and affords the resident an opportunity to ask questions, seek clarification on supervision requirements, and better set attainable goals and action steps within their release plan.

5. **Establish and enhance relationships with members of their community.** The likelihood of successful reentry is directly related to the number of **positive healthy connections** in place prior to release. The returning individual will need to **reestablish connections** with **family** (including any minor children), caring and responsible **friends**, and **faith-based organizations** or other community bodies. Additionally, formal relationships with **mentors** and **community service providers** support reentry.

Exemplar: Insight Garden Program

IGP understands the importance of familial support for helping returning individuals to successfully navigate reentry. IGP gathers family contact information prior to a program participant's release and acts as a liaison with the family members to ease some of the anxiety and uncertainty they may have as their loved one is transitioning back to the community. IGP also offers a **family reunification restorative justice program** for family members and participants who have endured the trauma associated with long-term incarceration. In IGP's experience, this helps to strengthen the family bond and provides a mutual understanding of future goals and expectations for participants. IGP employs a **peer support model** whose reentry peer staff consists solely of formerly incarcerated individuals. They rely on their own lived experiences in successfully navigating reentry to support people as they come home.

Exemplar: Family Pathfinders

Family Pathfinders includes family reunification as a core component of prerelease programming from the

beginning. This component includes workshops and small-group instruction where participants can take ownership and assess their situations, evaluate which family members with whom it is safe to reconnect, recognize that they may be without family ties, and learn how to **create a covenant or contract with their family** to define the terms of their new relationship. Family reunification services contribute to successful reentry by providing participants with the necessary tools to reestablish or create healthy family relationships resulting in sources of support integral to success and reduced recidivism.

(Note: Family Pathfinders also addresses practice 7.)

6. **Gather government-issued IDs.** One of the most significant barriers to reentry is obtaining necessary identification. A multitude of benefits are associated with having a valid ID, including the ability to obtain employment, find housing, and access other programs. Each returning individual must be provided all necessary identification documents prior to their release from incarceration. This includes their **birth certificate, social security card, and state-issued ID** (e.g., driver's license). This may require **partnerships between State and Federal agencies** (e.g., the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Department of Corrections, the Social Security Administration, Vital Records).

Exemplar: Kansas Department of Corrections

KDOC partners with the **Kansas Department of Revenue and the Department of Motor Vehicles** to set up both **on-site** equipment and **mobile units** to issue State IDs to residents at all State facilities prior to release. KDOC secured funding to assist residents who cannot pay for this service. Having outstanding fines and fees may stand in the way of the individual securing a valid ID, so staff work with residents to resolve unpaid fines and fees.

Exemplar: Louisiana Department of Corrections

Through a **partnership with the Louisiana Office of Motor Vehicles (OMV)**, LDOC was provided training and equipment, and were authorized by OMV to create state IDs at regional reentry centers and State institutions. Through memoranda of understanding with the **Social Security Administration and Louisiana State Office of Medicaid and Medicare**, LDOC can **obtain replacement Social Security cards and Medicaid cards** and give them to the returning individuals when they are released.

7. **Connect with service providers in the community.** Many individuals need to engage with service providers in the community upon their return home. Ideally, those service providers have been **actively engaged** in delivering pre-release services and planning for **postrelease engagement**. Prior to the time of release, returning individuals should know which service providers will be a part of their reentry plan, and plans should be in place for how the returning individual will engage with the providers to **achieve their goals**. This practice allows the initiation of supports and services at the time of release.

Exemplar: Insight Garden Program

IGP creates a **customized reentry resource directory** for all participants—**based on their county of release**—that contains supports and services in their county and matches the reentry goals and needs to the participant's **transition questionnaire**. The IGP reentry coordinators connect the participant with appropriate service providers including introductions, appointments, and enrollment as needed. IGP's reentry coordinators help participants establish medical and mental health care, apply for SNAP food stamp benefits, and obtain identification or other important documentation, if needed.

Exemplar: Family Pathfinders

Family Pathfinders partners with multiple nonprofits in the community to provide clothing, food, substance use support groups, housing, mental health support, and connections to second chance employers. Pathfinders created a **referral pipeline** to connect participants to nonprofits unable to operate within the jail and provides written referrals through a **Reentry Resource Packet** several months prior to release. A Family Pathfinders reentry specialist walks each participant through the personalized resources and referrals based on established needs during early reentry case planning so appointments can be made upon release.

8. **Implement education plans.** Many returning individuals have goals to obtain degrees or address gaps in knowledge and have identified educational aspirations in their reentry plan. DOCs and releasing agencies need to provide them with **proof of educational attainment while incarcerated** (i.e., a GED, traditional high school diploma, vocational certificate, credit toward a certificate or degree) and general directions for obtaining documentation of educational accomplishments prior to incarceration, as needed to pursue their goals. DOCs and releasing agencies should additionally provide guidance and points of contact, if possible, to help returning individuals establish a clear pathway to pursue educational opportunities at release.

Exemplar: Insight Garden Program

After having examined returning individuals' prior educational attainment, IGP places qualified individuals in appropriate settings to continue educational pursuits. The educational pathway may include completing their GED through adult basic education programming, career technical pursuits, or postsecondary education in the community. For example, IGP works closely with **Project Rebound**, a college support program for formerly incarcerated students that is currently at 14 of the 23 California State University (CSU) campuses. The IGP reentry staff either work at various CSU Project Rebound campuses or are currently enrolled students with the support of Project Rebound. Returning individuals can participate in postsecondary educational opportunities through the program. IGP has created an extensive resource list based on the various counties to which participants return and created contacts within organizations to provide a warm handoff for people to connect with educational resources. Any educational accomplishments obtained prior to incarceration or while incarcerated, such as a GED or postsecondary achievement, are included in the individual's reentry questionnaire.

9. **Implement work training and employment plans.** Reentry plans should align experience and training with employment goals. DOCs and releasing agencies must provide returning individuals with proof of certifications, licensing, and other credentials attained while incarcerated, provide information about any relevant restrictions to sectors or positions of interest, and otherwise help them prepare to obtain or perform a living-wage job to sustain themselves into the future. Release portfolios should include occupational licenses, apprenticeship certificates, resumes, and general letters of application. Individuals may choose to continue or complete training begun prior to release to develop skills necessary to fulfill job responsibilities. Community based programs can offer work training and employment supports that provide services and an array of job-related resources accompanied by help accessing the resources and securing apprenticeships and ultimately job placement.

Exemplar: Louisiana Department of Corrections

The ReAPs developed during the returning individual's incarceration and the TDE includes documents deemed vital to removing barriers to a successful reentry. One component of the TDE reflects **work/skill training certificates** achieved prerelease. As plans develop for **job placement** or a **continuation of training**, these certificates and work-related credentials inform job seeking for the returning individual. LDOC provides a copy of the TDE to probation and parole staff to ensure a deeper understanding of the returning individual's work-related skill set, inclusive of work experience prior to incarceration.

Exemplar: Insight Garden Program

IGP has partnered with dozens of programs across the state of California that offer workforce development supports. IGP has found programs that provide **paid internships with guaranteed job placement** after completion of the program through Rising Suns Opportunities, Anti-Recidivism Coalition's Union Trades Program, Homeboy Industries Workforce Development, and A New Way of Life. IGP has created an extensive resource list based on the various counties to which participants return and identified contacts within these organizations to provide a personal connection to job-related resources and employment.

10. **Provide safe and supportive housing.** Reentry plans must address where the returning individual will live and how those living arrangements will be **sustained over time**. The individual may need **supportive housing** for a period of time, may **live with a family member**, or with sufficient resources, **may rent or own their own home and furnishings**.

Exemplar: Kansas Department of Corrections (KDOC)

KDOC has **lease contracts** in place with proprietors around the State to provide **transitional housing** for returning individuals who do not have other viable housing options. Often qualifying individuals have significant behavioral health needs, and for them obtaining stable housing is challenging but critical. KDOC has established voucher funds to assist with rent, deposits, utilities, furnishings, and other expenses. The returning individual participates in each step of developing a housing plan. Ensuring safe, stable housing, a primary basic need, alleviates some stress for the returning individual and allows them to focus on other areas of the release plan.

Exemplar: Northeast Kentucky Reentry Program

As part of a participant's reentry plan, the Northeast Kentucky Reentry Program assists participants in identifying where they will be living upon their release. Where a participant lives can vary depending upon their needs, diagnosis, and willingness to change. **Housing options** include (1) residential treatment with transition to sober living, (2) sober living, or (3) returning to their home or a family member's/friend's home. The reentry program will assist the participants with **move-in fees and bedding**. The program has requested donations of furniture, kitchen supplies, and so on for participants who have moved into their own apartments. The program connects participants with community organizations that will assist them with **rent and utilities** until they can support themselves.

11. **Provide necessary transportation.** Reentry plans need to address how the returning individual will get **from home to work (or school) and to appointments**. This may require resources from local reentry programs to cover the costs of **public transportation**. Furthermore, a lack of transportation is one of the most common barriers that individuals in **rural areas** face during the reentry process. Transportation cannot be overlooked because without it, the returning individual may not be able to secure and maintain employment or attend mandatory treatment and meetings.

Exemplar: Northeast Kentucky Reentry Program

The Northeast Kentucky Reentry Program **provides transportation to appointments, work, and shopping** until participants learn the bus routes and establish an outside support system to assist them in meeting this need. This program provides **bus passes and gas cards** to active participants to assist them with transportation costs.

Exemplar: Insight Garden Program (IGP)

IGP provides **gate pickup and transportation to a release address** that has been approved by the participant's supervising parole agent prior to release. IGP works closely with the California Division of Adult Parole and coordinates with their staff to provide prerelease and postrelease support. IGP provides **community transportation passes** for individuals to ensure they can travel within the community for work, school, appointments with parole agent, services required as conditions of release, and medical appointments. Also, IGP provides a prepaid smartphone so the returning individual can access GPS and Google maps to navigate their community.

12. **Make concrete plans for sustaining physical and behavioral health and well-being.** Reentry plans should address (1) **mental health**, (2) **substance use recovery**, and (3) **physical health issues**; these factors are critical in promoting well-being and a successful transition to the community. The returning individual with physical or mental health needs may need to be released from incarceration with a **supply of medication** (e.g., high blood pressure, insulin, psychotropic medications, etc.) that will last until their **first scheduled appointment** with a community healthcare provider. A returning individual who has substance use issues has **participated in evidence-based treatment** while incarcerated and should have a **recovery plan** established with identified community providers. In all three instances, DOCs and returning agencies should facilitate a connection to the community care provider prior to release, including scheduling initial appointments and providing contact information.

Exemplar: Kansas Department of Corrections (KDOC)

KDOC created **Discharge Planner positions** in all state prison facilities to coordinate benefit applications, schedule postrelease behavioral health and medical appointments, and secure nursing home/assisted living placements. An evidence-based curriculum on substance use disorders is offered at all state facilities, and participants receive a drug/alcohol assessment pre-release followed by connections to appropriate care in the community. **Medication Assisted Treatment** is also available as an option when criteria are met. Residents are released with a 30-day supply of all medications in addition to scheduled appointments with community providers. As a result, wait times for care are reduced, services are uninterrupted, and residents obtain immediate access to critical services.

Exemplar: Louisiana Department of Corrections

LDOC creates a **healthcare discharge summary** at all regional reentry programs and State institutions based on need. LDOC sends a copy to the Probation and Parole Division, as well as to postrelease healthcare providers. The agency also schedules **postrelease healthcare appointments**, including behavioral health appointments. LDOC provides medication at discharge along with refill prescriptions. LDOC has aligned its formulary with that of community clinic partners for easy refills and to ensure physicians' prescriptions are honored there. Probation and Parole holds the returning individual accountable for making their initial appointments as well as taking and refilling prescribed medications.

Exemplar: Northeast Kentucky Reentry Program:

To address the reentry issues faced by individuals at the Rowan County Detention Center, the Northeast Kentucky Reentry Program implements **evidence-based activities** such as cognitive behavioral programming, integrated mental health/substance use treatment, case management, advocacy, peer supports, assistance with primary health care, and access to recovery and community-based services. These services are designed not only to address substance use disorders and co-occurring disorders but also to assist the participants in developing trust, building connections, and meeting their basic needs to prepare for a prosocial life outside of the confines of jail.

13. **Restore Medicaid or other healthcare insurance coverage.** Because many returning individuals leave the facility on medication and have health concerns, some chronic in nature, DOCs and releasing agencies should determine whether returning individuals are eligible for Medicaid coverage or have access to other healthcare insurance coverage. As appropriate and based on existing conditions, plans to assist all returning individuals with **reactivating or establishing Medicaid or other healthcare insurance coverage** is necessary given the cost of medical treatment, care, and medication.

Exemplar: Kansas Department of Corrections

KDOC partners with the **Kansas Department of Health and Environment and the Social Security Administration** to ensure benefits vital to success and well-being—including Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security, and waivers—are activated or reinstated immediately upon release or as soon as possible thereafter. **Discharge planner** positions embedded within each facility's reentry department are responsible for working with residents to gather information and submit the necessary applications within established timeframes.

Exemplar: Louisiana Department of Corrections

Through a **memorandum of understanding with the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH)**, the LDOC and LDH share data and complete the Medicaid application process to obtain Medicaid cards for returning individuals upon their release.

14. **Provide technology training.** A working knowledge of technology is increasingly essential for returning individuals to navigate life postrelease, including to identify and connect with programs and services in the reentry plan. DOCs, other releasing agencies and community organizations, as well as the service providers they refer individuals to, must ensure that those individuals can access and **use modern technology**—cell phones, laptop computers, or tablets—as needed and appropriate to engage with that entity. This includes to engage with those entities via apps, email, and other types of messaging as well as to navigate needed transportation options.

Exemplar: Insight Garden Program

IGP provides a **prepaid smartphone** for all participants in reentry. The IGP team often works with participants to help them learn how to use the various apps on their phone. Some participants, after long-term incarceration, need basic assistance such as turning on the phone and applying the right amount of pressure to activate icons. IGP also **provides Chromebooks** to participants who enroll in school upon release. IGP provides basic technological training during weekly Zoom circles for those who need extra support learning to use their devices.



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