

# Finding Out ‘What Works’ in Reentry: Discovering Evidence-Based Practices

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*Prisoner reentry has recently returned to the policymaking agenda, as the need to remedy the cycle of incarceration is being acknowledged and addressed. With this renewed interest in reentry come federal funds and an effort to rigorously evaluate programs aimed at helping prisoners successfully reintegrate into their communities. This paper examines these initiatives, describing lessons learned and identifying obstacles of both program implementation and evaluation. The goal is to provide insights and recommendations for policymakers and practitioners in order to facilitate the development of evidence-based practices. I find that many implementation obstacles are related to issues of coordination and communication, as various service providers struggle to provide continuous, comprehensive services. Scientifically rigorous outcome evaluations are emerging, which provide useful examples of the types of studies that will help identify ‘what works’. In the conclusion, I provide several recommendations for moving forward.*

## INTRODUCTION

Even though society is still struggling to identify “what works,” there is a broad and overwhelming consensus that the current criminal justice system is not working. The United States has high rates of incarceration and re-incarceration unparalleled abroad. Our criminal justice system cycles offenders in and out of prisons, through a “revolving door” that never seems to stop.<sup>1</sup> Inmates are released with few if any resources and usually end up returning to the

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<sup>1</sup> The latest national study of released prisoners by the Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that 52 percent of prisoners released in 1994 were sent back to prison within three years (Langan and Levin 2002).

institution after failing to reestablish productive lives in the community. This alarming reality is both a fiscal and social problem: state budget deficits bring enormous prison expenditures to light as social injustices in the system persist. Reforming the system to end the cycle of incarceration will have positive effects on the bottom line while reducing crime and thereby increasing public safety. Clearly, the deterrence effects of harsh prison sentences have not been effective. It may be time to once again embrace and expand the rehabilitative capacity of the criminal justice system.

The prevailing model of rehabilitation in reentry initiatives today is needs-based. Much of the literature has identified major areas in which offenders lack skills and resources as opportunities for intervention.<sup>2</sup> Released inmates face many material and psychological obstacles that must be overcome to prevent a return to the institution. To the extent that these deficiencies are assumed to contribute to repeat offending (or technical violations of parole), addressing them is expected to reduce recidivism. Actually doing this, however, is no easy task and not necessarily one that the current criminal justice system is set up to handle successfully.

Meeting all of these needs undoubtedly requires partnership and cooperation with community-based groups and other government agencies. The major challenge involves determining how to provide a vast array of coordinated services to offenders both pre- and post-release. Issues of accountability and case management are of primary concern as successful program design and evaluation of success depend on tracking outcomes. The rehabilitation of

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<sup>2</sup> In a 2008 report entitled "Release Planning for Successful Reentry," the Urban Institute identified eight fundamental and immediate needs of prisoners upon release: transportation, clothing and food, financial resources, ID and important documents, housing, employment and education, healthcare, and support systems. Many of these needs persist for long periods, but are especially important obstacles early after release that need to be addressed to promote successful reintegration.

prisoners is not in itself a new concept, as it has over time fallen in and out of favor with policymakers, practitioners, and the public at large. As positive or negative evidence, or studies marketed as such, emerges, the importance of the rehabilitative approach to prison reform moves in step. Recently, there has been a growing movement postulating that putting more resources into reentry efforts may be a solution to the rising costs of incarceration<sup>3</sup>. New federally funded initiatives in the last decade reflect this hope. There has always been an understanding, and now an explicit statement, that rehabilitative programs must prove their value through demonstrated results. This has culminated today as a commitment to “evidence-based” practices in reentry.

This paper examines the extent to which evaluations of reentry initiatives have successfully demonstrated results, and in cases where they have failed to do so, highlights the major obstacles encountered in their attempts. The evolution of federal grant solicitations over the last ten years sheds light on some of the lessons learned and the overall direction in which reentry is heading. The purpose of this inquiry is to provide background and recommendations for policymakers and practitioners looking to move toward truly evidence-based practice in reentry. These practical considerations fill a gap in the literature, which has largely dealt with needs assessments and corresponding program elements. Focusing study on implementation and evaluation struggles will provide both useful recommendations and areas for further research.

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<sup>3</sup> In this paper, the terms “rehabilitation” and “reentry,” as they apply in a corrections setting, may appear to be used somewhat interchangeably. In the past, “rehabilitation” as applied in a corrections setting was the term used to describe therapy, education, or training programs for inmates aimed at positively affecting their attitudes or behaviors. In this context, the term “rehabilitation” could describe any of a broad variety of programs with different goals and outcome measures, focused on changing personal characteristics of the inmate to increase the likelihood that he/she will cease reoffending. “Reentry,” on the other hand, is more precisely defined as a host of coordinated services, including rehabilitation, provided to individual inmates pre- and post-release, aimed at helping them become reintegrated into their communities. Reentry strategies therefore include services to address behavioral change of the individual inmate as well as provision of resources and services to enhance his/her relationships within the community. Reentry service providers include departments of corrections (and other government entities) as well as community-based organizations. In theory, they all work together to provide comprehensive services that support successful transition from prison or jail to the community. While other outcomes are also considered, the widely accepted measure of success for reentry programs is a lack of recidivism. Other outcomes, such as acquiring housing or remaining drug free, are also important as factors contributing to delayed or prevented recidivism.

The methods used to approach this topic include an extensive review of the rehabilitation and reentry literature from the 1970s to the present. As a jumping-off point, the infamous “what works” criterion popularized by Robert Martinson (1974) and reworked by other researchers in the field is adopted as a broad term used to identify effective programs. The evolution of this framework is described in the first section, along with other reviews of reentry programs. I argue that the problem of few scientifically rigorous studies persists today and needs to be remedied.

## **BACKGROUND**

In 1974, Robert Martinson’s influential paper “What works?—questions and answers about prison reform” sought to summarize successful rehabilitation programs, based on an evaluation of 231 such programs. His findings were interpreted to mean that “nothing works,” when in fact a more accurate conclusion would have been that “we do not know what works.” The studies available at that time were based on haphazard and disparate programs that were poorly evaluated, making it difficult to draw conclusions or make generalizations. Programs targeting different kinds of offenders with different treatments made it difficult to draw comparisons, and few programs had ever been replicated. Martinson acknowledged these problems in his report but remarked that the programs were the best he had to work with (24-25).

Nevertheless, the conclusion that most programs fail had an impact on the subsequent decline of rehabilitation efforts. Policies were inspired by a “tough on crime” philosophy that focused on punishment and deterrence. Martinson’s evaluation contributed to the shift away from rehabilitation and to the adoption of the arguably unfounded belief that treatment does not work. Seeing this as a problem requires acceptance of the opposing belief that treatment does (or at least *can*) work. This is the direction that policy is reverting to, but there is still much to be

learned. Martinson's paper was well-intentioned, setting out to provide a comprehensive literature review and analysis that would reveal effective rehabilitation practices. Although there were many studies of rehabilitation programs circulating in the criminal justice community at that time, no one had tried to aggregate this research into a comprehensive analysis, as Martinson sought to accomplish. However, the execution of his analysis has been widely criticized for its over-reaching conclusions and the subsequent effects on policy. The controversial conclusion provided an important lesson for researchers, and spurred further analysis as other researchers sought to investigate and refute his claims.

It is interesting to note the effects of Martinson's report on the actions of his client, as they are contrary to those it had on policy and attitudes more broadly. As Martinson reveals, New York State, which hired him to do his rehabilitation survey, ended up ignoring and even attempting to conceal his findings, because they threatened programs the state had already decided to implement (22). Whether this was because federal funding under the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act had already been secured or because the state blindly subscribed to the competing belief that treatment *does* work is unclear. As a critic points out: "Sadly, one of the most important lessons of the post-Martinson years is that research findings are susceptible to selective use in order to support ideological concerns" (Van Voorhis 1987, 60). Theory-based practice sometimes overlooks evidence as inertia perpetuates trends that may lack scientific support or may even be contrary to empirical knowledge. To some extent this is unavoidable, because a lack of good data cannot be allowed to trigger indefinite immobilization. Often policy and program decisions have to be made despite inconclusive or nonexistent evidence. But to overlook existing data or fail to help create it dooms efforts to being based on ideology and not

supported by facts. When taxpayer money is at stake, this is not feasible in the long-run, as those paying for programs will begin to demand evidence that their money is being used efficiently or at least effectively.

Unquestionably, data is needed to support theories of rehabilitation. Today there is some evidence that rehabilitation programs work but the availability of quality research is still a problem. More systematic studies about what works, how, and for whom are needed to guide future programming. “The best one can claim to ‘know’ about effectiveness is based only on the quality and quantity of the available evidence at one point in time” (MacKenzie 2000, 460). Current programs need to be evaluated and designed with evaluation in mind, so that future efforts can be guided by an accumulation of research that focuses on responses to the evaluative questions policymakers are asking or likely to ask.

In the time since Martinson’s infamous paper, other researchers have attempted to conduct similar reviews of rehabilitation program evaluations. Seiter and Kadela (2003) identify thirty-two studies to which they apply their modified “what works” criteria: reduced recidivism, increased job placement, academic achievement, and remaining drug-free. They use the Maryland Scale of Scientific Methods developed by Sherman et al. (1998) to rate studies from one (weakest) to five (strongest) on overall internal validity. Level-five studies use the golden standard of random assignment, while level-one studies show correlation between a type or level of program and an outcome measure at a single point in time. “What works” is defined by at least two level-three evaluations stating that the intervention was effective. “What does not work” is defined by at least two level-three evaluations drawing that conclusion, while “what is promising” is identified as findings with low level of certainty but marked by some empirical

basis. Everything not fitting into these categories is “unknown.” This evaluative framework reflects lessons learned from the Martinson years: mainly that a lack of evidence of effectiveness is not equal to evidence of ineffectiveness. Seiter and Kadela identify several categories of programs with evidence of success, including vocational work programs, drug rehabilitation, and halfway house programs. They remark, however, that more evaluations of current programs are needed for better analysis and call for more of our prison expenditures to be put to this purpose.

Another similar assessment of effectiveness studies using the same methodology also finds that many programs are effective (MacKenzie 2000). As in Seiter and Kadela’s analysis, however, studies of varying scientific merit must be sorted through and distinguished in order to draw reasonable conclusions. Many available evaluations describe implementation, but not outcomes. More scientifically rigorous outcome evaluations would make these kinds of analyses easier, contributing to the discovery of evidence-based practices in reentry.

Researcher Patricia Van Voorhis (1987) points out that although studies may be limited, they are not worthless. She recommends a shift away from polarized labels of “working” versus “not working,” proposing that one instead evaluate programs based on degrees of success (56). Clearly, if the evaluative criteria of the reviews cited above are any indication, research is indeed headed in this direction. Moving toward a spectrum of effectiveness or “promise” will help to identify areas for further research and evaluation instead of lead to the writing off of poorly evaluated programs that may actually be working.

Ted Palmer (1983), another critic of Martinson’s conclusion, agrees that too often inconclusive or negative evaluations influence the general view of rehabilitation programs as hopeless. Just because we are not yet sure which programs effectively reduce recidivism, he

argues, does not mean that we will never be able to find out. This paper will summarize the recent developments in reentry implementation and evaluation since 2000, jumping off from the reviews of Martinson and others to show what is being learned along the way. The availability of new federal grant programs for reentry initiatives provides an important financial and political opportunity to progress toward evidence-based practices. In addition to identifying lessons learned so far, I intend to illuminate both new and persistent obstacles to achieving this goal, making recommendations for overcoming them that will be of use to policymakers and practitioners alike.

### **RECENT REENTRY INITIATIVES AND THE OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE**

Given the incomplete and inconclusive body of evidence in support of reentry initiatives to date, what reasons are there for maintaining seemingly blind faith in its potential? One reason is that this faith is not blind, as there are programs reported to have some degrees of success. The reviews described above identify some of these programs as well as their most effective components. Other evaluations also reveal positive effects. The National Council of Crime and Delinquency recently rigorously evaluated a youth program in Florida, with the specific intent of moving the view of this program from “promising” to “evidence-based” (NCCD 2009). The evaluators used experimental design, randomly assigning youth to control and experimental groups, who received differing levels of services. Researchers found positive education, employment, and recidivism outcomes for those in the experimental group, compared to their counterparts. Rigorous studies like these are still rare but becoming more common and are making important contributions to the literature.

Lacking a breadth of scientifically rigorous studies, some remain skeptical about other less scientific, self-reported success stories. However, rather than discarding these stories as useless, this skepticism should inspire more systematic, independent evaluation (and implementation models that would facilitate scientific study). Another reason to continue pursuit of effective reentry programs is the fiscal crisis in corrections. Part of the push for evidence-based practice, in reentry and elsewhere, is a desire for efficiency. Tight budgets and increasing levels of overcrowding mean that spending on corrections needs to be done with care. While many effective or promising reentry programs may seem expensive, the fact of the matter is that incarcerating and re-incarcerating significant portions of the United States population is itself very expensive. Even minor reductions in recidivism could offset program costs.

Public interest and support for reentry initiatives is high and federal money has been allocated for demonstration projects by departments of corrections and community organizations (Cullen and Gendreau 2000). The availability of federal funds for these initiatives constitutes a great opportunity to implement new programs and evaluate existing efforts, aiding the development of evidence-based practices. Federal guidelines also contribute to the reentry discourse by explicitly defining terminology, expectations, and appropriate outcome measures. Among grantees, this means more standardization in both implementation strategy and evaluative criteria. This produces two useful results: evaluation and outcome measure requirements will provide raw data and program information for researchers, and more homogenous programs will be more comparable. This is not to say that all programs under the grants are identical, as this is far from either the actual or desired reality, but the overall approach to reentry and program elements should follow the same logic model. An overview of federal

grant programs from the last decade follows, and hopefully sheds light on the general direction in which reentry is heading.

## **FEDERAL GRANT PROGRAMS, 2002 – PRESENT**

Federal grant money was awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) under the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI) in 2002, awarding three-year awards of between \$500,000 and \$2 million to sixty-nine grantees to “develop, implement, enhance, and evaluate reentry strategies that will ensure the safety of the community and reduce serious, violent crime and recidivism.” The initiative sought to identify barriers to successful reintegration and explore ways to overcome them. Grantees provided pre-release services and were required to partner with departments of corrections (DOCs) and at least one community organization. Supplemental funding was awarded to original SVORI grantees in Fiscal Year 2004. The Urban Institute and Research Triangle Institute (RTI International) are in the final stages of a five-year evaluation of this initiative. Although the complete evaluation of SVORI is still forthcoming, they have released evaluations of the implementation of SVORI programs in grantee sites and preliminary findings about “what works” (Lattimore 2009). They identified several evaluation challenges, including: (a) variation in programs and participants, (b) the absence of any one “program” to evaluate because of the customized nature of services, and (c) the difficulty of identifying comparison subjects. The evaluators interviewed released prisoners thirty days prior to and at three, nine, and fifteen months post-release. Evidence of some positive effects of reentry efforts is shown here. They found that SVORI participants were doing moderately better fifteen months out, were more likely to have a job, and self-reported less drug use. However, as the researchers point out, differences in programs and target populations may

mean it is not very informative to lump them together. Some programs may have worked better than others, or some population subsets may be more affected than others by similar efforts. Nonetheless, the identification of evaluation challenges is itself a significant contribution to the field, as future programs could be designed to avoid or at least minimize these obstacles. The customized nature of services is at the heart of the reentry philosophy, so this is something that researchers will have to continue to contend with, but difficulty identifying comparison subjects, for example, could be avoided by experimental design with random assignment. It is also encouraging to note that, despite these evaluative complications, researchers are still finding evidence of success. Better program design more conducive to formal scientific study could reveal more conclusive results.

In his 2004 State of the Union address, President George W. Bush called for \$300 million in funding “to expand job training and placement services, to provide transitional housing, and to help newly released prisoners get mentoring, including from faith-based groups.” This acknowledged the need for ways to reduce the number of people constantly cycling in and out of the nation’s prisons. His statements also reveal a growing faith in the philosophy of reentry: that prisoners can be reintegrated by providing supportive services and creating positive alternatives to continued criminal behavior. Some of the offender needs identified through SVORI and other early reentry programs include job training, housing, and mentoring.

Policymakers are evidently paying attention to the lessons of implemented programs and using that information to more specifically define program elements and goals. For example, a lesson learned from SVORI implementation concerned the target population: grantees found it difficult to identify willing participants among the serious and violent offenders, so later

initiatives allowed grantees to select their own target populations. Beginning in Fiscal Year 2006, the DOJ, under the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI), awarded funds to state agencies to “reduce recidivism by helping returning offenders find work and access other critical services in the community.”<sup>4</sup> Specific requirements were few, including minor stipulations about the target population to be served (eighteen and older), the number to be served (two hundred), program length (twenty-four to thirty-six months), and performance measures. Collaboration was required with faith-based and community organizations that had been awarded grants the previous year by the Department of Labor (DOL) to provide employment-centered services. An extensive assessment of the BJA PRI program grantees’ experiences was conducted and revealed that many implementation problems were encountered (Muller and Owens 2009). One of the major issues encountered by many of the BJA grantees concerned the requirement to partner with DOL grantees. BJA grantees were supposed to provide pre-release services and then refer released offenders to their DOL counterparts for community-based services. However, because the DOL grants had been awarded one year prior to the BJA grants, there were many inconsistencies in eligibility criteria as well as overall ineffective communication and coordination. Tracking issues also made it difficult for BJA grantees to report outcome measures, as they reported only being able to track recidivism rates for those offenders who returned to the same institution. The evaluation compiled a detailed summary of grantee implementation problems and made recommendations for improvement. These issues, and the many others they encountered, highlight the difficulties of coordination

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<sup>4</sup> The full-text of SVORI and PRI grant announcements and awards can be found on the BJA website: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/grant/reentry.html>.

between the institution and the community, as well as the difficult issue of tracking the offenders themselves. Additional awards were made under the PRI in Fiscal Year 2007 and Fiscal Year 2008, but no longer stipulated connection to the DOL. Similarly comprehensive evaluations of the 2007 and 2008 programs would contribute to research by revealing progress in the extent to which these implementation obstacles either persisted or were overcome. Outcome evaluations cannot be conducted (and contribute to evidence-based practice) for programs that are not successfully implemented.

The Second Chance Act, passed in 2008, followed with congressionally approved funding in Fiscal Year 2009 for reentry initiatives. In 2009 the PRI program became part of the initiatives supported by the Second Chance Act, with the grant announcement and requirements greatly expanded.<sup>5</sup> Reentry was explicitly defined:

‘Reentry’ is not envisioned to be a specific program but rather an evidence-based process that begins with initial incarceration and ends with successful community reintegration, evidenced by lack of recidivism. This process includes the delivery of a variety of evidenced-based program services in both a pre- and post-release setting designed to ensure that the transition from prison or jail to the community is safe and successful.

The development of this definition reflects the consensus among those working in the emerging reentry community that services need to be comprehensive and continuous. Services should be provided both inside and outside of the institution, as required for successful transition

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<sup>5</sup> The full-text of Second Chance Act grant announcements and awards can be found on the BJA website: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/grant/SecondChance.html>.

and support after release. While still leaving room for individual grantee discretion concerning specific program details, the announcement provides guidance by stating a clear strategic vision. Grants for mentoring programs were also established, as mentoring was identified as an important component of the reentry process. Grants were awarded for five programs: separate juvenile and adult mentoring programs and PRI demonstration projects, and a National Reentry Resource Center.<sup>6</sup> Solicitations for Fiscal Year 2010 demonstration and mentoring grant applications were released in December 2009 and January 2010, respectively.<sup>7</sup> New partnerships are being formed between DOCs and community organizations that represent system change through cooperation and evolving responsibilities. Coordination issues experienced by PRI grantees in earlier years are being remedied as a cooperative reentry community transcending the walls of the institution begins to develop. The diverse needs of offenders are becoming well known, but effective methods for addressing them are still being explored. Federal grant money comes with the requirement of outcome measurement, which will contribute to the development of best practices.

Calling reentry an “evidence-based process” emphasizes the need for data collection and evaluation. Grantees must measure recidivism (both new offenses and technical violations), crime reduction, needs assessment, service provision, and other outcomes. The Fiscal Year 2010 demonstration grant announcement insists that all grantees agree to “cooperate in any and all related research efforts and program evaluations by collecting and providing enrollment and

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<sup>6</sup> OJP’s BJA and OJJDP solicited applications under five grant programs: Second Chance Act Mentoring Grants to Nonprofit Organizations, Second Chance Act Prisoner Reentry Initiative Demonstration Grants, Second Chance Act National Adult and Juvenile Reentry Resource Center, Second Chance Act Youth Offender Reentry Initiative, and Second Chance Juvenile Mentoring Initiative.

<sup>7</sup> These are the Second Chance Act Adult and Juvenile Offender Reentry Demonstration Projects and the Second Chance Act Mentoring Grants to Nonprofit Organizations.

participation data during all years of the project.” The information garnered through these efforts will supply the government and practitioners with program data, but the degree of generalizability may be low, because each applicant targets a self-selected prisoner subset. However, the grant announcements state that priority will be given to those who describe how evidence-based methodology will be used and how an effective program might be replicated. Although diverse prisoner populations and community resources may prevent exact replication, valuable insights can still be gained: for example, which specific program components are successful for certain offenders, or methods for better coordinating service delivery. Shared and explicitly stated goals and outcome measures will enhance generalizability despite the impossibilities of identical reentry initiatives or target populations. Hopefully, rigorous independent evaluations will be forthcoming in the years immediately following implementation of these programs. If correctional institutions allow random assignment, researchers will be able to shed light on effective programs.

### **THE FUTURE OF REENTRY: MEASURING SUCCESS**

Overall, recidivism reduction is a desirable goal because it can improve the criminal justice system’s bottom-line and because it is assumed to reflect enhanced public safety. Other outcome goals, however, like securing a job or permanent housing, are important as indicators of expected reduction in recidivism risk (Palmer 1983). They also represent positive developments in ex-offenders’ lives, and are important for their own sake, whether or not they contribute to reductions in recidivism. As President Bush stated in his 2004 State of the Union address: “America is the land of second chance, and when the gates of the prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life.” Now that this goal has been declared, the task at hand is figuring out

how to accomplish it. While making efforts to rehabilitate by investing in reentry initiatives may make Americans feel like we are honoring this decree, we are wasting valuable resources and a great opportunity to make a difference in the lives of offenders and the public at large if we fail to achieve success. Success, as I have already established, involves discovering evidence-based practices that reduce recidivism and will inform program design. Rigorous evaluations of past and current programs are the key to making this discovery. Wide public support and the availability of federal funds create political and financial climates ripe for progress. Capitalizing on this opportunity to demonstrate success will help to ensure future funding and support for reentry initiatives that are desperately needed. For those who believe in the logic of reentry, this is the chance to accumulate evidence and develop best practices. As federal grantees implement their programs and comply with evaluation requirements, there should be more documentation of outcomes. Implementation and evaluation obstacles will surely be identified, but hopefully these will be minimized with time as federal grantees and others learn from their own experiences and those of each other. As programs become successfully implemented, outcome evaluations will provide insight into what types of reentry programs reduce recidivism.<sup>8</sup>

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The outlook is hopeful and expectations are high, but we in the reentry community must be careful about our own expectations of success. Making a commitment to evidence-based practice means we must avoid the opposite of Martinson's mistake. Well-done negative

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<sup>8</sup> As a concrete resource, the National Reentry Resource Center website ([www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org](http://www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org)) is working on a "what works" library that will accumulate lessons learned and user-friendly summaries and reviews of relevant studies. This forthcoming web page, at the center established by Second Chance Act funding, can provide a means of reference and communication among policymakers and practitioners in the reentry community. This will ideally be one of many forums in which information will be shared and ideas developed.

evaluations (showing ineffective programs) must not be ignored in favor of ideology, but rather can be used to inform future efforts. Finding reliable evidence that something does not work is valuable because scarce resources can be transferred to other more promising interventions that may be more effective. Adherence to our goal of discovering evidence-based practices means accepting the possibility that we may not always like the results. Furthermore, the need to conduct rigorous evaluations and develop best practices has been identified, but time may reveal that real success requires broader change, transforming the way offenders interact with the criminal justice system and reevaluating system goals and expectations. Needs-based training and resource provision may not prove a cure-all for hostile environments inside and outside of prison. Issues of supervision, coordination, and ultimate responsibility may emerge as agents of reform, but they also run the risk of becoming roadblocks if not addressed and mitigated. We need to accumulate evidence on effective rehabilitative interventions, but we also need to learn how best to integrate them. Finding the pieces to the puzzle is only useful if we also figure out how to put them together.

From here, we need to continue implementing programs, evaluating them along the way and sharing results. Accordingly, I offer these recommendations to facilitate the development of evidence-based practices:

- Scientifically rigorous program evaluations should be conducted for as many programs as possible as standard practice. Experimental design should be used whenever possible, with participants randomly assigned to experimental and control groups.

- Service providers should develop common goals that will encourage cooperation and coordination. Shared evaluative criteria and responsibility will increase provision of continuous and comprehensive services.
- Methodologies to produce recidivism rates for various reentry programs should be standardized to facilitate comparison between programs. I would recommend two measures: rates of return to prison or jail because of a new conviction, or violation of the terms of supervision at twelve months after release (coinciding with the federal Second Chance Act PRI grant definition) and three years after release. These are both commonly used time periods, so they should not impose any great burden. Reporting two measures will give a good picture of short-term and longer-term effects on recidivism rates, as many programs have reported delayed but not completely avoided recidivism effects.
- The term “reentry” itself also needs to be used with care as research begins to accumulate, so that singular rehabilitation programs concentrating on only one piece of the puzzle are not mistaken as true reentry efforts. Although I do not intend to provide a formal, conclusive definition here, for now I suggest adopting the federal definition cited above and repeated below:

‘Reentry’ is not envisioned to be a specific program but rather an evidence-based process that begins with initial incarceration and ends with successful community reintegration, evidenced by lack of recidivism. This process includes the delivery of a variety of evidenced-based program services in both a pre- and post-release setting designed to ensure that the transition from prison or jail to the community is safe and successful.

Although this list of recommendations is not exhaustive, it will make it easier to accumulate a base of evidence and help lead to truly “evidence-based” practices in reentry.

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