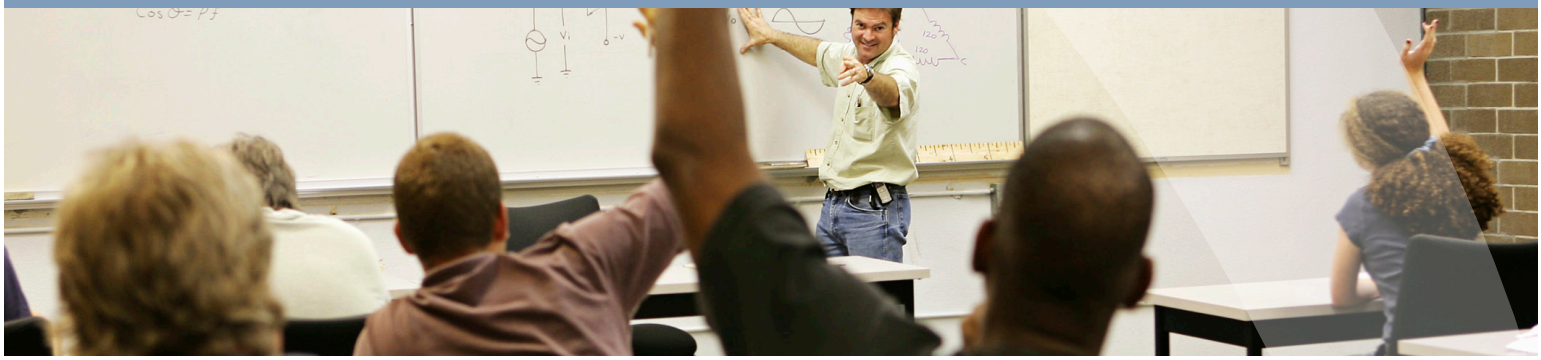
SUPPORTING SECOND CHANCES

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES FOR PEOPLE RETURNING FROM CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES



The figures can be hard to fathom; the faces easy to forget. More than 2 million people are incarcerated on any given day in the United States.[1] That's roughly the equivalent of the entire state of New Mexico locked in state and federal prisons, local jails, and youth correctional facilities.

There are many reasons we need to pay more attention to this population. One of the most important is this: Nearly all inmates eventually return to their communities.

- More than 95 percent of today's prison population will be released at some point.[2]
- More than 700,000 people transition out of state and federal correctional facilities each year.[3]
- Between 12 million and 14 million ex-offenders live in communities around the country.[4]

Some will reintegrate smoothly, but success is far from certain. Within three years, almost half of released prisoners commit another crime or violate the terms of their release and go back behind bars.[5] One of the biggest predictors of successful reentry? Full-time employment.[6]

This brief highlights strategies for strengthening education and employment pathways for youth and adults returning from correctional facilities and notes key questions that new research should answer. It also explores barriers to employment for people with criminal records—whether or not they have been incarcerated—and potential policy solutions.

JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

"These are young people who made mistakes that aren't that different than the mistakes that I made, and the mistakes that a lot of you guys made. The difference is they did not have the kinds of support structures, the second chances, the resources that would allow them to survive those mistakes."

— President Barack Obama

BARRIERS TO FINDING WORK

Unfortunately, people returning from prison face major barriers to finding work—and not just the common bias against hiring anyone who has been convicted of a crime. As a group, these youth and adults lack critical characteristics of career success; they have lower education and skill levels than the general population and few are trained for specific occupations. Here are some of the facts:[7]

- The average state prisoner has a tenth-grade education.
- About 70 percent of state prisoners have not completed high school.[8]
- Less than half of youth in juvenile facilities have a diploma or GED.

"With hundreds of former inmates returning to their communities each day, helping these individuals successfully reenter society must become a priority," says Jobs for the Future Senior Vice President Maria Flynn. "They need access to education and occupational training to help them build careers and gain economic stability."

President Barack Obama has raised the profile of these issues in his recent push for criminal justice reform. President Obama wants to reduce the harsh sentences for nonviolent offenders incarcerated under "mandatory minimum" drug laws and make it easier for former inmates to transition smoothly back to their communities. Removing barriers to employment is central to their chances for success.

On July 31, 2015, the Administration is expected to announce plans for a pilot program to make federal Pell Grants available for inmates, in order to help them attend college while incarcerated. If the experimental program is successful, it may increase momentum to overturn the 1994 ban and greatly expand educational and career opportunities for inmates.

DOES PRISON EDUCATION WORK?

Yes, it definitely does. That's according to an influential RAND Corporation meta-analysis of research on programs providing education to incarcerated adults.[9] The programs studied included Adult Basic Education classes, high school/GED programs, vocational education, and postsecondary courses that count for credit toward a degree.

Key findings from the study:

- Inmates who participated in correctional education programs had **43 percent lower odds of recidivating** than inmates who did not.
- Participating in a high school diploma or GED program, in particular, **reduced the odds of recidivism by 30 percent**.
- The odds of **obtaining employment post release** among inmates who participated in correctional education (either academic or vocational programs) was **13 percent higher** than for those who had not participated.
- **Correctional education programs are cost-effective**. The direct costs of reincarceration were far greater than the direct costs of providing correctional education.

For more information, see the RAND Corporation report for the U.S. Department of Justice, "How Effective Is Correctional Education, and Where Do We Go from Here? The Results of a Comprehensive Evaluation."

ADULTS NEED EDUCATION, TRAINING TO FIND JOBS AFTER PRISON

The United States has the highest incarceration rate of any country in the world. As public interest grows in shortening prison sentences for non-violent drug

crimes, it is becoming more and more important to focus on strategies for improving the post-prison lives of former inmates.

Prisoner reentry programs of some sort have been introduced in all 50 states, according to recent research by the National Academy of Sciences.[10] But there is a wide variety in purpose and design.

"Our nation has the highest incarceration rate in the world. Helping former inmates successfully reenter society must become a priority."

—Maria Flynn, Jobs for the Future

Research suggests that the best programs begin in prison and extend throughout the release and reintegration process. Despite lack of rigorous research on program effectiveness, emerging "what works" literature suggests that "programs focusing on work training and placement, drug and mental health treatment, and housing assistance have proven to be effective."[11]

Reentry Education Must Begin Behind Bars

In Colorado, the Department of Corrections begins the reentry process in its prisons, says Heather Salazar, the agency's associate director of prison operations. The DOC markets services to inmates via prison TVs, and vocational and educational services begin while offenders are still inside. For anyone who has not finished high school, the top priority is to get a GED. This could involve Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, or other specialized instruction as needed.

Work readiness and job training skills are just as important. Through a DOC division called Colorado Correctional Industries, which is self-funded and operates like a private company, inmates are employed (on prison grounds or off) at fish farms, furniture factories, goat farms, auto shops, or even fighting fires.

Offenders receive coaching about how to answer questions surrounding one's crime and incarceration. It is important for offenders to speak in a way that demonstrates they are "taking ownership for the crime," Salazar says. "You can explain what you've learned from the experience, the skill sets developed in prison, what you learned since, and how you've improved your life."

Other Colorado reentry strategies include a gradual increase in independence and reduction in structure as inmates get closer to their release time. For example, prisoners can decide for themselves when to wake up and when to eat, instead of following group rules. Small changes such as these can help inmates start to build skills like time management that they otherwise do not have the opportunity to develop.

After Release, Reentry Specialists Help Find Housing, Jobs

Once ex-offenders are released, they can start visits with a reentry specialist, or they may need to be referred to one through their parole officer. Reentry specialists typically have a caseload of 50 to 80 people. Immediately upon release, they focus on the most important needs of the ex-offender such as housing, food, and finding a job. Anyone who is on parole is welcome to meet with a reentry specialist in Colorado, but ex-offenders typically see them for the first three to six months of their transition.

The state also encourages cross-training with local service providers, such as faith- and community-based organizations and county agencies, so that everyone can work together to support ex-offenders. Wraparound support services are provided as much as possible.[12]

Reentry specialists partner with workforce centers and use labor market information to identify the best job opportunities and employers. Salazar acknowledges that, "connecting to employers is the biggest challenge." Each community or region tends to have different employers who are receptive. Some of the most open-minded employers she has met are in manufacturing and warehousing.

For jobs where a criminal record may exclude someone from getting a license, such as nursing, the ex-offender can still work in the field. Secondary support jobs, such as food, laundry, janitorial, and transportation services may be options.

Salazar also highlights the advantages parolees hold for employers: they are regularly drug tested, highly supervised, and have curfews. Plus, the employer can earn tax credits for hiring them.

In Colorado, workforce training is provided as much as possible upon release as it was during incarceration. Older offenders may need to be brought up to speed on technology, so basic computer classes may be a starting place. Salazar encourages teaching this population with engaging, hands-on activities rather than having them sit and listen to a lecture. She also recommends bringing in subject matter experts, who can minimize the potentially negative dynamic of reentry specialists always telling the ex-offenders what to do. Finding and cultivating an internal motivation can be the first step in helping someone on the road to success.

Growing Number of Cities and States "Ban the Box" on Job Applications

> People who were incarcerated "need to take ownership for their crime and explain what they've learned, the skill sets they got in prison, how they've improved their lives."
>
> *—Heather Salazar, Colorado Department of Corrections*

About 70 million people in the United States have some sort of a criminal record.[13] Although employment is essential to staying out of the criminal justice system, extensive research has shown that finding a job is all too difficult for many people with records.[14] In fact, men with criminal records account for more than one-third of all nonworking men between the ages of 25-54.[15]

Ban the Box legislation forbids employers and state agencies from asking whether or not a job applicant has been convicted of a crime. Sixteen states and over 100 cities and counties have implemented these policies and legislation, and advocates are continuing to spread fair chance hiring practices around the country.

Advocates for ex-offenders say this step is essential to ensuring that these individuals have a chance to reintegrate into society, because many employers otherwise would reject such job candidates out of hand.

For example, in a study conducted in New York City, a criminal record reduced the likelihood of a callback or job offer by nearly 50 percent (28 percent for applicants without a criminal record versus 15 percent of applicants with). The negative effect of a criminal record was substantially larger for black applicants.[16]

Sometimes this prohibition applies only to the first step of a job application process, but it is enough to make a difference:[17]

- In one city that banned the box, 2.3 percent of the workforce had a criminal conviction in the year prior to the ban. Four years later, 15.5 percent of the workforce had a criminal conviction.[18]
- According to employer data, there is no correlation between a long-ago criminal conviction and success in the workplace.
- There is no evidence that employers leave states that ban the box. Large employers like Target, Walmart, etc., have stores in states with ban the box and the data show no evidence of problems.

Ban the Box legislation also builds in a wide variety of protections for employers. "You complied with the law," David Domenici, executive director of the Center for Educational Excellence in Alternative Settings in Washington, DC, explains, "and now we're going to indemnify or protect you if you hired a formerly incarcerated person and they do something illegal."

There is also growing interest in removing the question from college applications. The New York City community college system removed the requirement to disclose juvenile charges on its applications. Removing this box from the Common Application and other college application systems would be another important step, according to Domenici. "Sixty-six percent of people who had a criminal conviction quit the Common Application process at the moment they hit that box," he says.

Policy Recommendations to Help Increase Successful Reentry

Employment is an essential part of building a life outside of prison, and there are many related issues that must be addressed:

Pell Grants for higher education

- The Obama administration is expected to announce plans July 31 for a pilot program to offer Pell Grants for inmates in order to help them attend college while incarcerated. If an experimental program is successful, it may increase support to overturn the 1994 ban and greatly expand educational and career opportunities for inmates.[19]

Work Opportunity Tax Credit

- Educating employers on how to make use of the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, a federal tax credit available to employers for hiring individuals from groups that consistently face significant barriers to employment, including ex-offenders.[20]

Program funding

- The funding for workforce centers that help former inmates find jobs are outcomes driven at the federal level. This can lead centers to steer away from the former criminal population because they are harder to place; centers often have one specialized staff person working with parolees.
- On-the-job training funding may backfire because employers can—and often do—fire trainees at the end of the three-month paid-training period. Salazar encourages advocates and agency workers to look into how to tap Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Perkins, and job training funding.

Housing

- Ex-offenders often face barriers to public housing. Even though public housing policy cannot ban most people with a conviction,[21] public housing offices "have wide latitude to decide who to or not to accept," explains Domenici. One solution is to create housing plans with paths from shelters, to group living (possibly exclusively for formerly incarcerated people), to supported housing in a more diverse, independent environment.

Sealing criminal records

- Some states are enacting laws to make it easier to seal or expunge criminal records. For example, good behavior post-conviction for a certain period of time automatically expunges one's record, rather than requiring the individual to initiate and proceed through a complicated process.

Collateral consequences

- Task forces or multi-agency groups are assessing and changing a range of laws and administrative procedures that have collateral consequences for those with a criminal record, such as child support requirements and denial of public benefits.

Flexible verification of employment status

- Allowing more flexibility around methods of verifying work (as a term of parole or probation) would be a helpful step. For example, if a person is bringing in their pay stubs regularly, "do you have to call my employer and say you're my parole officer?" Domenici asks. Verifying employment without the supervisory officer coming to the place of employment could also make the person more likely to be able to keep their job and not face stigma.

Tiered or modified sanctions

- Tiered or modified sanctions for technical and other parole violations would be a solution that allows for "one strike" when a parolee is otherwise doing extremely well. For example, if someone goes to work every day and pays their bills on time, but they miss one supervisory meeting, the first violation would not be held against them.

YOUTH PRISON PROGRAMS NEED ATTENTION

More than 70,000 juvenile offenders are held in residential placement, such as juvenile detention and correction facilities.[22] Almost all will get out and need further education and training in order to find a job. Many will need other supports to help stabilize their lives, as well.

> "We need to change the hearts and minds of employers that this is a population worth employing."
>
> *—Barbara Endel, Jobs for the Future*

These young people are particularly challenging to serve. Juvenile facilities house a highly transient population of students with widely varied educational and emotional needs. A disproportionate number have learning disabilities, multiple emotional difficulties, a history of drug use, a past suicide attempt, and/or weak academic skills.[23]

School districts, community colleges, and community-based organizations must learn how best to work with these youth, says Domenici. "It may not be your main focus, but somewhere along the way, some of the kids you're working with are going to be kids with youth criminal charges."

Unfortunately, there is little large-scale research on the most effective strategies for helping juvenile offenders return to school and reintegrate into their communities. The law requires juvenile facilities to provide education, but little is known about the characteristics of a quality program—one that lowers the risk of committing crimes in the future and increases the chance of finding stable work at a living wage.

The Center for Educational Excellence in Alternative Settings (CEEAS) is a national nonprofit organization

JFF Creates Pathways Out of the Criminal Justice System for Young People

Jobs for the Future is using its expertise in designing college and career pathways that lead to high-demand jobs to improve the life prospects of young people who have spent time in correctional facilities.

In partnership with the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions, JFF was awarded a Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grant to launch Opportunity Works, an initiative of communities implementing proven pathways to postsecondary credentials for opportunity youth, and scaling the pathways through a collective impact approach.

The SIF funding, which comes from the Corporation for National and Community Service, supports both financial and technical assistance to communities as they build their pathways. The initiative also includes an evaluation to assess the effectiveness of these pathways, especially for boys and men of color.

Several Opportunity Works sites are reaching youth involved with the justice system, including San Francisco, Santa Clara, and Philadelphia.

"There's probably no population more in need of pathways into occupational training programs that will pay off in a good job," says JFF Associate Vice President Lili Allen, who leads the organization's reconnection strategies and designs. "It's incumbent upon us to create these pathways—for returning citizens, for society, and for our economy."

For example, Bay Area Community Resources and its partners in the Road Map to Peace collaborative in San Francisco, CA, will provide education, workforce, and support services to 18- to 24-year-old youth of color, in particular Latino males, who are involved with gangs and/or exposed to violence. Over three years, the Bay Area partners will help 300 young people to transition to postsecondary education and careers. JFF and Aspen will provide technical assistance and lead a peer learning community of all grantees.

Roadmap to Peace is working to improve school completion rates and job placement for disconnected young men in San Francisco. Through this community-driven collaborative, reengaged youth enroll in Five Keys Charter School, a Sheriff's Office-sponsored state charter school that offers GED and diploma-granting programs. Five Keys has locations at 21 sites across the city, including in jails.

Community-based organizations will provide comprehensive support services and case management, as well as self-efficacy, violence-prevention, and career-readiness training, as the young people work toward a high school credential and employment. Collaborative partners will create subsidized employment based on individuals' career interests. Construction industry training will be available to all.

Five Keys Charter School along with other collaborative partners can scale this carefully designed approach to ensure that youth transitioning from the juvenile justice system persist toward a high school degree and into training leading to a credential with value in the labor market.

"We are excited to partner with Opportunity Works sites to develop such pathways and create evidence-based models for adoption across the country," Allen says.

For information on JFF's work with opportunity youth who have been involved with the criminal justice system, please contact Lili Allen at lallen@jff.org.

dedicated to helping youth in alternative schools and in locked facilities improve their life chances. Among its programs are Unjammed, a blended learning initiative that uses technology to transform teaching in secure care facilities. Other programs focus on reading, writing, and creative self-expression. CEEAS also provides tools and training for teachers and principals, as well as technical support for education and juvenile justice agencies, including the Los Angeles County Office of Education and the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice.

Preparing juvenile offenders for the workforce is an essential part of their education, according to Executive Director Domenici. Increasing paid job-training opportunities that lead to industry-accepted credentials and postsecondary credits would be a major step in the right direction, he says.

Learner-centered approaches show particular promise, according to Domenici. He recommends working with individuals to help them determine their areas of greatest interest and potential, and then exploring how their abilities could potentially be profitable in the world of work. For example, introducing students to computer programming by having them run a digital music studio is likely to engage young people in learning how to code. Some may want to pursue careers in the music industry, while others decide to investigate a wide range of technology-focused jobs.

"We have to really develop the individual and show them their own potential, roll that into something potentially profitable and give them self worth."

—David Domenici, Center for Educational Excellence in Alternative Settings

Policy Recommendations for Youth

While career pathway programs that lead to well-paying jobs are important for improving the life chances of youth offenders, a wide variety of public policies can help these young people even before they earn a high school credential, says Domenici. Many of these policies are controlled by state and local administrative agencies, and are likely much easier to change than state law.

Alternative schools

- Most youth coming out of detention or correction facilities are sent to "alternative schools," many of which have a poor reputation. Some states, such as Florida and California, now require a specific reason for an adjudicated student to go to a mandatory alternative school. The policy requires a chance for the student, family, and caseworker to meet and discuss options; in some cases, they can meet with a principal of a traditional high school who would be willing to enroll the student.

Graduation requirements

- High school graduation requirements that vary from district to district can hold students back, such as when they believe they need one more course to graduate, but then move to another city and need several. Statewide diplomas have been successful in about a dozen states in easing this problem.

School funding

- Schools and districts can receive financial incentives to offset the higher costs of teaching over-age, undercredited youth by adapting funding formulas. An alternative formula might send a certain amount of additional money to each district for each adjudicated youth, and the funding could be used to hire a social worker who can help *all* students.

Pell Grants for higher education

- The Obama administration issued new guidance in 2014 to clarify that students in juvenile correctional facilities may apply for Pell Grants to pay for postsecondary education. Now the U.S. Department of Education is preparing an experimental program to allow some adult inmates to use Pell Grants, as well.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

This is an exciting time for people who care about improving life opportunities for youth and adults who are returning to their communities after serving prison sentences. Two decades of bitter debate over how to treat nonviolent offenders is evolving into a consensus that the criminal justice system desperately needs reform.

Congressional negotiators have been working for months on the details of a bipartisan reform proposal, which may be unveiled this summer. It is expected to include new guidelines to reduce sentences for nonviolent crimes and efforts to do more to help rehabilitate prisoners and smooth their reentry to society.[24]

The Obama administration is already taking important steps to improve the quality of education inside prison, in order to expand employment possibilities for ex-offenders on the outside. If the expected Pell Grant pilot program shows results, we must consider expanding the federal aid to all low-income inmates.

Adopting proven pathways to college and careers for young people and adults with low levels of literacy must be part of any criminal justice reform package. The most successful models feature comprehensive supports for specialized populations. If our nation is going to give people a second chance, let's make sure it's not wasted.

This brief is part of a series that highlights key issues and best practices discussed at Bridging the Gap: Postsecondary Pathways for Underprepared Learners, held recently in New Orleans. Other topics include: support services to help underprepared students balance school and daily life and engaging employers to help build effective pathways to work.

ENDNOTES

[1] James, Nathan. 2015. *Offender Reentry: Correctional Statistics, Reintegration into the Community, and Recidivism*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service. https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL34287.pdf

[2] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. "Reentry Trends in the United States." http://www.bjs.gov/content/reentry/reentry.cfm

[3] Davis, Lois M. et al. 2014. *Correctional Education and Where Do We Go From Here? The Results of a Comprehensive Evaluation*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

[4] Center for Economic and Policy Research. 2010. "Ex-offenders and the Labor Market."

[5] See endnote #1.

[6] Many studies have indicated that reentry initiatives that combine work training and placement with counseling and housing assistance can reduce recidivism rates, according to *Offender Reentry: Correctional Statistics, Reintegration into the Community, and Recidivism* (see endnote #1).

[7] Presentation by David Domenici. April 9, 2015. Bridging the Gap conference, New Orleans, Louisiana.

[8] Western, Bruce & Becky Pettit. 2010. "Incarceration and Social Inequality." *Daedalus*. Vol. 139, No. 3.

[9] See endnote #3.

[10] National Research Council. 2014. *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press. Available at: http://www.nap.edu/catalog/18613/the-growth-of-incarceration-in-the-united-states-exploring-causes

[11] See endnote #3.

[12] For more information about wraparound support services in a broader context, see *These People Just Keep Trying to Help Me—Supporting Students in College and Career Pathways*. 2015. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future. Available at: http://www.jff.org/publications/supporting-students

[13] National Employment Law Project. 2015. "Fact Sheet: Research Supports Fair Chance Policies."

[14] See endnote #13.

[15] See endnote #13.

[16] See: http://www.nij.gov/topics/corrections/reentry/pages/employment.aspx

[17] See endnote #7.

[18] Study conducted in Durham, NC. Source: Presentation from Domenici, see endnote #3.

[19] Stratford, Michael. 2014. "Pell Grants for Juvenile Offenders." *Inside Higher Ed*. December 9. Available at: https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/12/09/obama-administration-says-juvenile-offenders-may-receive-pell-grants; Fain, Paul. 2015. "Obama Administration May Soon Announce Experimental Access to Pell Grants for Incarcerated Adults." *Inside Higher Ed*. May 20. Available at: https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/05/20/obama-administration-may-soon-announce-experimental-access-pell-grants-incarcerated; Quick Takes. 2015. "Pell for Prisoners Announcement Coming." *Inside Higher Ed*. July 28. Available at: https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2015/07/28/pell-prisoners-announcement-coming

[20] See: http://www.doleta.gov/business/incentives/opptax

[21] Public housing can only ban people with certain sex crimes convictions or drug offenses that involve having produced or sold crystal meth in public housing. Source: Presentation from David Domenici, see endnote #7.

[22] Campaign for Youth Justice. 2012. "Key Facts: Youth in the Justice System." http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/documents/KeyYouthCrimeFacts.pdf

[23] See endnote #3.

[24] Altman, Alex. 2015. "Can Congress Pass Criminal Justice Reform?" *TIME*. July 22. Available at: http://time.com/3968149/criminal-justice-reform-congress

RESOURCES

JFF RESOURCES

- Career Pathway Programs and Services
  - Maria Flynn, Senior Vice President
  - Barbara Endel, Senior Director
- Opportunity Youth Programs and Services
  - Lili Allen, Associate Vice President
- Federal Programs and Policies
  - Mary Clagett, Director, Federal Policy
- www.jff.org | 617.728.4446

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Bay Area Community Resources
- Center for Educational Excellence in Alternative Settings
- Colorado Correctional Industries: A division of the Colorado Department of Corrections
- Five Keys Charter Schools and Programs, San Francisco, CA: Founded by the San Francisco Sheriff's Department
- National Employment Law Project: Fair Chance Ban the Box Toolkit
- National Institute of Corrections: Resources such as training for transition to the workforce

Join conversations on Twitter: #BanTheBox or #FairChance about reforming employment practices; #cjreform or #jjreform for broader criminal and juvenile justice reform issues.

PRESENTERS

The following people led conversations at Bridging the Gap about educational and employment pathways for students returning from correctional facilities. Material for this brief was drawn from their sessions and additional research. More information about their backgrounds is available on the list of biographies.

David Domenici
Executive Director, Center for Educational Excellence in Alternative Settings

Heather Salazar
Associate Director of Prison Operations, Colorado Department of Corrections

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Jobs for the Future works with our partners to design and drive the adoption of education and career pathways leading from college readiness to career advancement for those struggling to succeed in today's economy. Across the country, we work to improve the pathways leading from high school to college to family-supporting careers. Our work aligns education and training to ensure that employers have access to a skilled workforce.

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