

**WHAT DOES RESEARCH TELL US ABOUT WHAT WORKS IN REENTRY?**

**Statement of**  
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**before the**  
**Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security,**  
**Judiciary Committee,**  
**United States House of Representatives**

**RETURNING CITIZENS:  
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR REENTRY**

**Thursday, February 27, 2020**

\* The views expressed are my own and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders.

I thank Katie Robertson and Fiona Blackshaw for their helpful comments and assistance in preparing this testimony.

Good morning and thank you, Chairwoman Bass, Ranking Member Ratcliffe, and members of the subcommittee, for the opportunity to speak with you today about reentry from prison. Please note that the views I express are my own and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders.

I have been studying how to promote the successful reentry of people exiting correctional facilities for the better part of two decades. My colleagues and I at the Urban Institute conducted the first and most comprehensive multistate longitudinal study of reintegration from prison to community of its kind.<sup>1</sup> We've also conducted dozens of evaluations of reentry programs—from large-scale demonstration programs<sup>2</sup> to smaller, county-led efforts (Willison, Bieler and Kim 2014)—most of which were funded with federal Second Chance Act dollars. In addition, I led an effort to create and populate the What Works in Reentry Clearinghouse,<sup>3</sup> for which we screened reentry evaluations for rigor and synthesized and summarized findings as a resource to the field (Lynch and La Vigne 2016 as cited in La Vigne 2019).

I sit before you today to share what I have learned about what works in reentry. The answer to that question is a complicated one. That's because for every type of program intervention you can imagine—from work release to family visitation programs and even transcendental meditation<sup>4</sup>—there's at least one rigorous study finding that the program yielded its intended impact, usually on recidivism reduction. But for each of these positive evaluations, there are dozens upon dozens of others with null and occasionally counterintuitive findings.

How do we make sense of it all? To truly understand what works in reentry, we need to back up a bit and explore what we know about reentry challenges and opportunities. Reintegration from prison is a multifaceted process, and success can be influenced by the factors and experiences predating incarceration, the incarceration experience itself, and the context surrounding the community and social environment to which one returns.

To put it simply, reentry isn't about just one need or one risk profile. I am often interviewed by members of the media about my research. A common question posed is, "What is the single biggest need among people exiting prison—the one that, if met, would have the greatest impact on recidivism?" This question is flawed; there is no single solution to recidivism, because people's reentry needs are exceedingly complex and frequently intertwined.

Take, for example, employment. It stands to reason that finding a job, particularly one with a living wage, supports successful reentry. Employment can provide financial independence, help secure stable housing, and make criminal activity less of a temptation. But unemployed people with substance use disorders need help meeting both those needs; a job alone might simply provide a source of funds to continue using.

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<sup>1</sup> Our work on the Returning Home Study is summarized on the Urban Institute website; see <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/justice-policy-center/projects/returning-home-study-understanding-challenges-prisoner-reentry>.

<sup>2</sup> "Evaluating Federal Second Chance Act Adult Reentry Demonstration Programs," Urban Institute, January 23, 2018, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/evaluating-federal-second-chance-act-adult-reentry-demonstration-programs>.

<sup>3</sup> "About the What Works in Reentry Clearinghouse," Council of State Governments Justice Center, accessed February 24, 2020, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/reentry/about-what-works/>.

<sup>4</sup> For work release, see Berk (2007) and Duwe (2014); for family visitation programs, see Bales and Mears (2008); and for transcendental meditation, see Bleick and Abrams (1987) and Rainforth, Alexander and Cavanaugh (2003).

Similarly, securing a job that is miles away from home in an area with limited public transportation infrastructure is setting up people who cannot drive for failure.

Focusing on housing alone presents a similar challenge. Halfway houses are beneficial for many people reentering their communities. But at least one study finds that they are actually harmful for people at low risk of reoffending (Lowenkamp and Latessa 2005), likely because halfway houses separate residents from family support networks (La Vigne 2010).

What my research has concluded is that focusing on one component of reentry doesn't work, nor does assuming that every person exiting prison needs the same reentry supports (La Vigne 2019). Successful reentry programs need to be both holistic—addressing all the needs of an individual—and tailored—recognizing that people have different needs. Tailoring services to individual needs rather than assuming that everyone requires every service or program is also a more responsible use of public resources.

The crafting and delivery of reentry services should also recognize that the hurdles to successful reintegration are composed of both big challenges—such as education, employment, housing, and health needs—and smaller, but critical, barriers—such as obtaining a picture ID, securing transportation to reentry services, and accessing and paying for child care. Importantly, reentry services should focus on assets, taking a strengths-based approach that acknowledges and builds upon individual skills, experiences, and support systems.

Early reentry research by the Urban Institute, for example, found that family support is critical to reentry success (Naser and La Vigne 2006, La Vigne et al. 2005). This surprised many people at the time because the prevailing narrative was that people leaving prison had burned bridges with family and that family members were unwilling or unable to provide the financial and emotional support their relative needed. This couldn't be farther from the truth: our research found that family members not just met, but often exceeded expectations of support on the part of their incarcerated relatives (La Vigne 2012). Yet among all the reentry programs in place across the country today, those that include efforts to shore up family support networks are extremely rare.<sup>5</sup>

Relatedly, programs that consider community context and tap into community resources are few and far between. Indeed, communities are rarely consulted—much less relied upon—to support the reintegration of people exiting prison. Far too often communities are viewed as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. But there is hope for meaningful change in this regard. Community-led safety initiatives recognize that the people closest to the problems are best positioned to both welcome people home and hold them accountable. These initiatives elevate the expertise and assets of the community and lead to more supportive and less punitive measures—and, ultimately, to better outcomes (Jannetta et al. 2014; Rice and Lee 2015).

Take Colorado, for example. As part of its criminal justice reform efforts the state invested resources in the communities hardest hit by mass incarceration through a competitive grant program. But instead of telling communities what to do with the money, the state invited communities to develop their own

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<sup>5</sup>“What Works in Reentry Clearinghouse,” Urban Institute, accessed February 24, 2020, <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/justice-policy-center/projects/what-works-reentry-clearinghouse-0>.

solutions with the assistance of a community-based intermediary.<sup>6</sup> Many solutions were developed and implemented by people who have experienced incarceration and successfully reintegrated, who know best how to connect with returning citizens and support their transition into the free world (Thomson et al. 2017). This program is theoretically sound, and it provides employment opportunities to the program's service providers, thereby building community assets.

Other community-led initiatives are beginning to emerge across the country (Sakala and La Vigne 2019). They deserve attention, resources, and rigorous evaluation.

The federal government has poured hundreds of millions of dollars into reentry for well over a decade.<sup>7</sup> While some positive findings have emerged, they are not commensurate with the resources expended. It's time to meaningfully invest in community-led responses that take a tailored, holistic, and strengths-based approach to reentry. Such efforts hold the best prospects of supporting the individuals, families, and communities that bear the brunt of mass incarceration in this country.

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<sup>6</sup> H.B. 14-1355, 69th Gen Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2014).

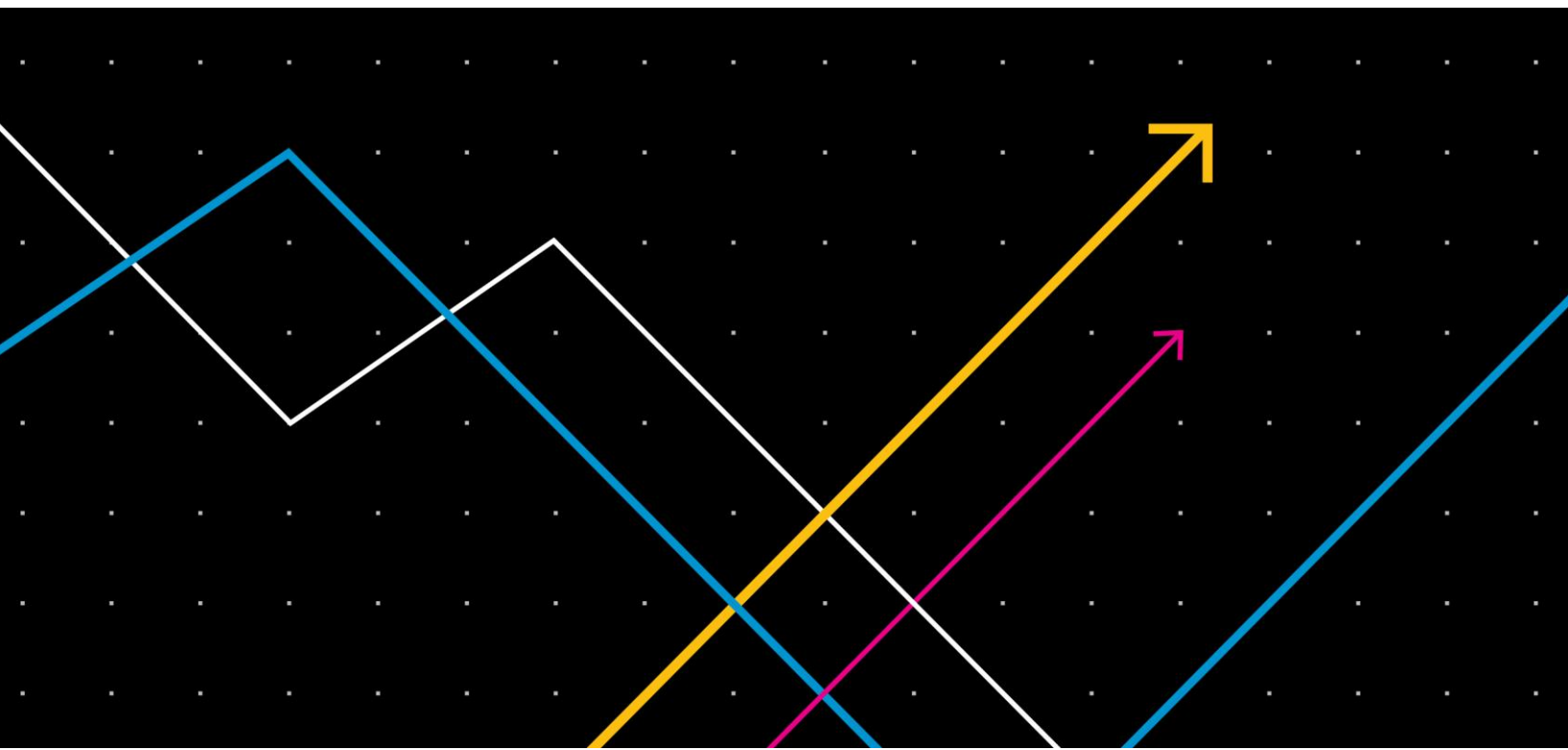
<sup>7</sup> See "The Second Chance Act" fact sheet at [https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/July-2018\\_SCA\\_factsheet.pdf](https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/July-2018_SCA_factsheet.pdf).

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RESEARCH REPORT

# Investing Justice Resources to Address Community Needs

**Lessons Learned from Colorado's Work and Gain Education  
and Employment Skills (WAGEES) Program**

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*February 2018*

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## ABOUT THE URBAN INSTITUTE

The nonprofit Urban Institute is a leading research organization dedicated to developing evidence-based insights that improve people's lives and strengthen communities. For 50 years, Urban has been the trusted source for rigorous analysis of complex social and economic issues; strategic advice to policymakers, philanthropists, and practitioners; and new, promising ideas that expand opportunities for all. Our work inspires effective decisions that advance fairness and enhance the well-being of people and places.

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Over the past several months, a wide array of people and organizations committed time and resources to discuss the lessons learned and challenges faced in the Work and Gain Education and Employment Skills (WAGEES) program. Urban thanks the WAGEES program grantees, the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition, the Latino Coalition for Community Leadership, the Colorado Department of Corrections, state officials, and other stakeholders for your insights, thoughtful feedback, and ongoing dedication to this field as well as our colleagues Nancy La Vigne, Jesse Jannetta, and Julia Durnan for your support and feedback during this process.

# Investing Justice Resources to Address Community Needs

The US criminal justice landscape has changed dramatically over the past decade, with more than half of the states taking steps to adopt evidence-based and cost-effective approaches to sentencing and corrections policies and practices (Harvell et al. 2016). These criminal justice reforms carry the promise of reducing the number of people under correctional supervision and helping to control skyrocketing costs, all while protecting public safety. Frequently, these reforms are accompanied by an up-front investment or a reinvestment of savings into “smart on crime” policies (Harvell et al. 2016). This investment process is a prime opportunity to identify public safety priorities and match resources to need.

Far too often, public safety investments focus narrowly on policing and incarceration strategies, which are not necessarily aligned with community needs and may, in fact, contribute to existing disadvantage and instability. In some communities, states are spending millions of dollars annually to arrest and incarcerate people.<sup>1</sup> However, the communities with the highest incarceration rates are often those most in need of resources for health care, housing, economic development, and social services (Petteruti et al. 2015). Not only does this narrow traditional spending approach fail to adequately address basic public needs related to health and safety, but evidence suggests that it can make these problems worse. Overusing incarceration, particularly when it is concentrated in certain communities, disrupts and destabilizes these communities by cycling people in and out of the criminal justice system and can result in an *increase* in crime rates (Rose and Clear 1998).

In contrast, neighborhoods are safer and experience less crime when residents are engaged in their communities and able to work together toward shared goals (Kubrin and Wo 2015; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997). Research shows that local, community-based organizations play a key role in providing services and facilitating engagement that strengthens neighborhoods (Lin 1999; Putnam 1993; Sampson and Groves 1989). In practice, though, these local organizations are often underresourced and excluded from public safety funding.

Although still in their nascent stages, there are emerging efforts to support community-based reinvestment that channel public resources or savings from policy reforms to community organizations. Collaborating with community members and organizations to develop public safety strategies ensures that those directly impacted have a voice in the process and can advocate for priority concerns. Initiatives to collaboratively advance public safety goals are diverse and include crime prevention

programs, services for people who have experienced victimization, services that connect people with social safety net programs, diversion and treatment services, reentry support, and neighborhood economic development. Early results from innovative models are promising (see Jannetta et al. 2014; Rice and Lee 2015).

One particularly innovative example is the Work and Gain Education and Employment Skills (WAGEES) program in Colorado. The program sets aside state resources for grants to community-led organizations that provide direct services to a local client base of formerly incarcerated people who are navigating the reentry process. WAGEES is a leading example of a state department of corrections directly investing in and partnering with community providers, many of which are led by people with firsthand experience in the justice system.

This report provides an overview of Colorado's community investment model and summarizes considerations and lessons learned from the WAGEES program. Understanding the program's challenges and successes can help other jurisdictions learn from the model and use it to inform their own efforts to boost and leverage community capacity to improve public safety and well-being. Key lessons learned include the following:

- Developing relationships with affected communities, community partners, state agencies, and other key stakeholders is time and resource intensive but is instrumental to building a foundation for collaboration and trust. Peer-to-peer learning and frequent communication can help foster these relationships.
- Community partners that reflect the people they serve through experience, location, and service priorities are best positioned to deliver services and provide guidance for resource allocation and support.
- The role of intermediaries is crucial, as they serve as a liaison and translator between state agencies and community partners to develop a coordinated initiative while providing capacity building and accountability.

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## BOX 1

### Key Players

- **Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC):** The key government agency engaging in the WAGEES program to connect people returning from incarceration to services in their community that encourage stability and successful outcomes.
  - **Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition (CCJRC):** A local nonprofit organization that seeks to eliminate the overuse of incarceration and invest in comprehensive strategies to advance community safety and health.
  - **Latino Coalition for Community Leadership (LCCL):** A national intermediary providing technical assistance to grantees receiving state funding, including assistance with relationship building, financial and data reporting, and information sharing.
  - **WAGEES community partners:** A group of several community- and faith-based organizations funded in part by the WAGEES program that provide a wide array of services to community members, including people returning from incarceration. Staff at the community partners, many of whom have direct and relevant life experience that informs their service provision, provide training and skills development to the WAGEES client population. Additionally, they leverage partnerships in the community to access goods and services that meet the target population's needs (e.g., jobs, housing, and basic goods). For more information on the community partners, see appendix A.
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## The Colorado Experience

On March 19, 2013, Tom Clements, the executive director of the Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC), was murdered in his home by a person who had been released to parole supervision. This tragic incident represented a crucial turning point for state leadership. Executive Director Clements had come to Colorado from Missouri to implement a reform agenda in corrections policy. Colorado leadership and legislators initially contemplated reactive and punitive measures to reduce the likelihood of a similar tragedy. But a local nonprofit organization, the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition (CCJRC), and several community reentry organizations saw an opportunity to continue the reform work started by Executive Director Clements. Through information sharing, organized site visits to nonprofit organizations, and advocacy on successful reentry strategies, CCJRC garnered enough support in the legislature to enact reforms. This shift to focus on support and rehabilitation would require a large culture change among both staff and justice-involved people. CCJRC worked to highlight the importance and impact of community-led public safety strategies and to ensure budget priorities included this piece of the reentry puzzle.

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## BOX 2

### Methodology

The Urban Institute (Urban) collected information for this report using the following methods:

- a document review of quarterly progress reports from LCCL and the community partners, memos from CCJRC, and state legislation and associated fiscal impact notes;
- semistructured interviews with 29 CDOC staff members, legislators, key staff from the community partners, and other stakeholders in various states and jurisdictions to discuss their role, their state's experience with the reinvestment model, and the successes and challenges they experienced; and
- visits with six of the seven WAGEES community partners in Colorado,<sup>a</sup> which included interviews with key staff at each community partner site, observation of a quarterly meeting attended by community partners and key state agency staff, and a visit to the Division of Adult Parole Reentry Services.

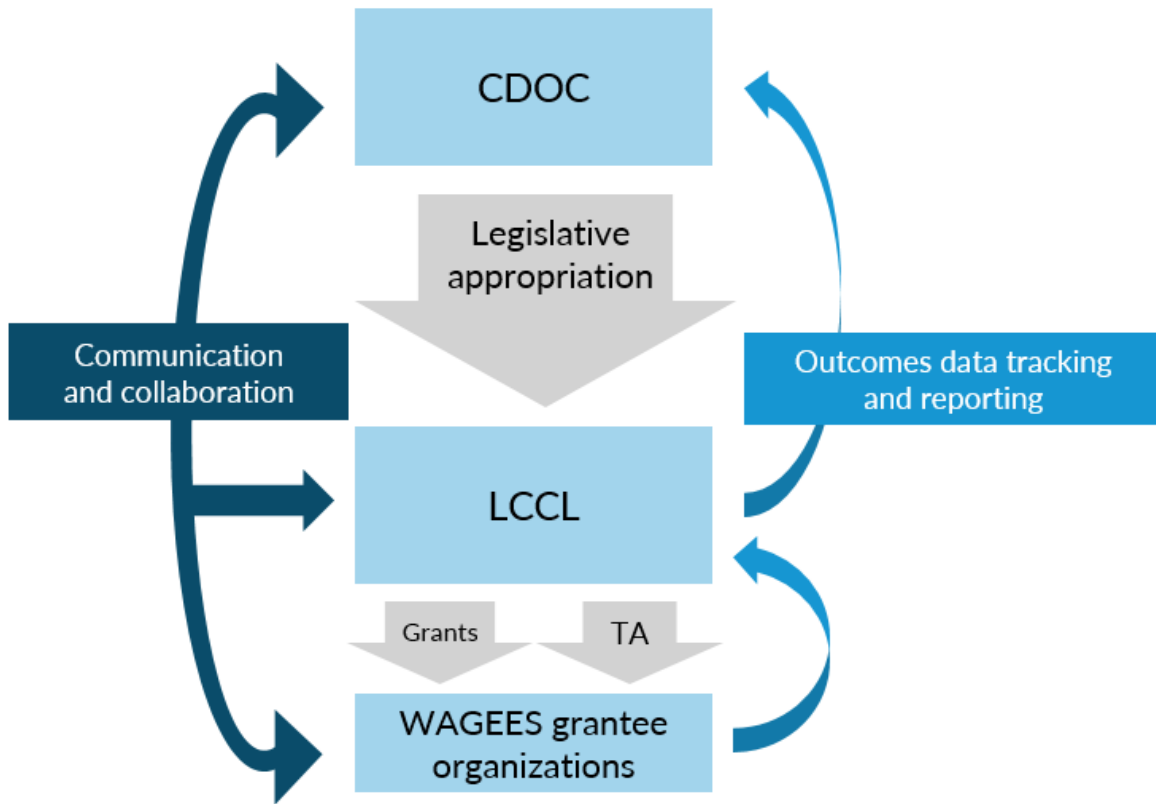
<sup>a</sup> This report reflects the experiences of the seven community partners engaged in the WAGEES grant program as of May 2017. A full list of community partners engaged with the grant program at some point from its inception to present day can be found in appendix A.

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## Colorado Engages the Community as a Partner in Protecting Public Safety

In 2014, the legislature passed HB14-1355. Among its other reforms, the law created a reentry grant program within the CDOC, the Work and Gain Education and Employment Skills (WAGEES) program, to provide funding to community-based organizations that support people returning from incarceration. Seven community-based organizations, the WAGEES community partners, were selected through a competitive process to provide a wide array of reentry services at eight sites throughout the state.<sup>2</sup> These community partners vary in funding amount, staff size, client population needs and size, and the number of years they have been working in the community and with the reentry population.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Understanding the WAGEES Model**



**Source:** Urban developed this model based on a concept provided by the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition and our conversations with state partners.

As outlined in legislation, the WAGEES program’s goals are to improve reentry outcomes by establishing a grant program to support community-based organizations that provide services to people returning from incarceration.<sup>3</sup> Although the WAGEES program focuses on employment and education services, the community partners offer a variety of services that clients can access while participating in the program.

The program is available to people currently on parole who are assessed by the CDOC Division of Adult Parole as being at medium or high risk to recidivate. People returning from incarceration via parole can join the program through a referral by CDOC or their parole officer or by opting into the program by reaching out to a community partner directly. If a person independently opts into the program, the community partner coordinates with the CDOC to determine if the person is eligible for participation (i.e., has been assessed as medium or high risk). Community partners conduct outreach and recruitment through their community networks, relying on open houses, word of mouth, and so on,

and also hold orientation and recruitment meetings in the prison. In collaboration with the parole officer, the community partner will develop a case plan for each person based on his or her specific needs. The intermediary organization, the Latino Coalition for Community Leadership (LCCL), provides technical assistance and support to enhance collaboration and communication between community partners and state stakeholders.

## **Establishing a Funding Mechanism**

The WAGEES program began in January 2015, and initial legislation provided funding for three years. Similar to various resource allocation strategies used by states that participated in the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI), Colorado stakeholders shifted funds within the CDOC's budget. The WAGEES program started with \$1 million in annual funding beginning in fiscal year 2015 (the 2014 legislative session), with \$710,000 added during fiscal year 2016 (the 2015 legislative session) for a \$1,710,000 annual allocation.<sup>4</sup> Once legislation was enacted and the community partners were selected, funding was disbursed on a cost-reimbursable basis as outlined in the legislation.

## **Providing Oversight and Support through an Intermediary**

Colorado selected LCCL to serve as a grantmaking intermediary, providing administrative oversight as well as leadership, resources, and capacity-building skills to help WAGEES partners meet the needs of their communities. The intermediary role was important to the launch of the program because the CDOC was not in a position to provide this support. LCCL provides guidance for WAGEES community partners and serves as a hub for information and services. Their key responsibilities include

- selecting community-based partners,
- disbursing funds,
- developing and administering program and fiscal data collection systems,
- tracking performance metrics, and
- coordinating the relationships between the CDOC and the community partners.

LCCL staff conduct regularly scheduled site visits to grantees twice a month to provide feedback on performance management, coordinate communication and services between community partners and

CDOC stakeholders, identify and address gaps in services, and train staff in program and fiscal matters. Every quarter, LCCL gathers all WAGEES community partners together to discuss challenges, solutions, and success stories and to share insights and information that shape the program's evolution. These convenings, along with one-on-one meetings and assistance, help the WAGEES community partners learn about and implement evidence-based or promising programming. A key component of LCCL's intermediary approach is maintaining high performance standards while meeting grantees where they are and fostering growth and continuous improvement, rather than imposing a rigid top-down model for all community partners to follow.

LCCL also provides technical assistance to the WAGEES community partners to increase their capacity and efficiency. Some of the community partners are newly established organizations and may have limited capacity. For some community partners, LCCL helps set up entire business systems to ensure they avoid the difficulties that smaller and newer organizations often face. These include business management and payroll system issues, communication challenges, knowledge and skill gaps, and cash flow problems. LCCL also works with WAGEES community partners to sustain employment/retention rates and offers assistance with grant applications, data reporting, housing placements, and developing strategies to reduce recidivism. LCCL works closely with the community partners to track client outcomes and compile performance metrics. As a steward for state funding, LCCL can end a partner's participation in the program if there are ongoing problems or if poor performance inhibits the expected return on investment.

LCCL designed a custom data collection system, Apricot, available to all community partners at little cost, to allow them to leverage successful outcomes and identify problems. The organization provides extensive training and real-time technical assistance to WAGEES community partners to address data collection or reporting issues as they arise. LCCL also works closely with the CDOC to ensure grant participation is accessible for the smaller WAGEES community partners and that reporting requirements are not overly burdensome.

As the program evolves to match the needs of the community partners, so does its infrastructure. To reflect the growth and emerging needs of the WAGEES partners, LCCL is developing a new system to capitalize on the progress of the program and provide community partners with a data platform that is not cost prohibitive to use. *CaseMGR* will track probation data and include additional fields to enhance the partners' capacity to more comprehensively measure outcomes.



## Empowering Communities to Advance Local Public Safety Strategies

The community partners receiving WAGEES funding are diverse in their approach to service provision, structure, and staff, but one unifying factor is that they are local organizations based in the communities they serve. The diversity among organizations is a strength of the program, as it provides the community partners the opportunity to offer unique and complementary services to best meet clients' needs.

A key component of WAGEES is employment as a stepping stone back into the community, and a handful of community partners employ people directly through various social enterprises. For example, some people work in a kitchen or food truck, and others build furniture or maintain outdoor trail systems. Some community partners work with local businesses, such as catering or logging companies, to employ people who participate in the program. Community partners can vouch for their clients and provide references for potential employers. Similarly, some provide housing for clients who, in turn, pay rent to help cover expenses. These opportunities help people build a credit or rental history to assist them in getting back on their feet.

## The Promise of Community-Based Reinvestment

WAGEES was implemented in early 2015 and has demonstrated promising initial results. As a program requirement, all community partners must report various metrics to measure outcomes. These metrics include enrollment numbers, employment placement and retention, credential attainment, and recidivism rates during program participation. A major success of the program has been overenrollment in every reported quarter. This demonstrates healthy demand but also puts stress on limited resources. Despite heavy enrollment and a concentrated population of people at high risk of reoffending, only 2.5 percent of WAGEES program beneficiaries have returned to prison for committing new crimes while in the program in the more than two years since the program began. Fifteen percent have returned to prison when including technical violations.<sup>5</sup> Table 1 summarizes the cumulative performance measures for WAGEES through September 30, 2017.<sup>6</sup>

TABLE 1

**Key Performance Measures as of September 30, 2017**

<b>Performance measure</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Description</b>
Enrollment rate	100% N=1,248	150% N=1,870	Cumulative number of people enrolled in the WAGEES program.
Placement rate	60% of participants	63% N=1,176	Cumulative number of participants placed in employment, occupational skills training, postsecondary education, and high school diploma/GED classes.
Employment retention rate	50% of participants	62% N=581	Cumulative number of participants eligible for employment verified as employed.
Credential attainment rate	50% of participants	76%  72%	Cumulative number of participants who participated in a credential program and attained a credential.  Cumulative number of participants who participated in an occupational training program and attained a credential. Postsecondary education and GEDs take a very long time to complete, which can lower the overall percentage.

## The Pathway to Success

The CDOC and the community partners worked together to make the WAGEES program successful for the state, its clients, and their communities by enhancing public safety and improving the reentry experience for people returning from incarceration. Some of the keys to success in this model include partnerships within the community and government agencies, building support and a constituency for the program, knowledge sharing, flexibility, strategic funding allocations, and building a network for services and support.

### Partnering with Affected Communities

A unique factor of the program is the full integration of each community partner into the neighborhood they serve. Although these community partners define themselves as “community based,” the exact definitions often vary. A community is not solely defined by geography and can also include cultural communities. WAGEES partners strengthen their communities by fulfilling a need, which could be geographically, temporally, or culturally specific.

Additionally, many of the community partners are led and staffed by people with firsthand criminal justice experience, some at the executive director or founder level. Many WAGEES community partners noted that their strong connection with the target client population helps them effectively deliver

services; as one provider observed, “We are them and they are us.”<sup>7</sup> These are not organizations that “parachute” into a community; they are people who are dedicated to serving their neighbors. Engaging people with lived experience in service provision provides an opportunity to leverage that expertise and increases client buy-in. By integrating formerly incarcerated people into their staff, community partners are “role modeling possibilities” for those they serve by showing the opportunities available to them.<sup>8</sup>

## **Building Support for Investment**

Stakeholders’ strategic use of informational site visits, relationship building, reentry reform champions, and organizational partnerships contributed to the WAGEES program’s encouraging early results. CCJRC played a pivotal role in garnering support for the legislation. CCJRC staff not only provided policy expertise during the legislative session, they also drew on a strong network of community-based partners to highlight the critical work already going on in the community. At first, CCJRC staff were met with resistance to change and hesitation to fund organizations outside the formal criminal justice system. To overcome this resistance, CCJRC invited key legislators and CDOC stakeholders to visit the community partners and observe their work and the services they provide. Allowing stakeholders to witness the transformative work of the community partners helped secure their buy-in and made it easier for them to champion the program.

Once the WAGEES program was funded and established, the community partners deepened stakeholder engagement by hosting open houses, celebrations, and community nights. Partners opened their doors to community members and parole officers alike to encourage them to learn more about their work. Partners also encouraged their clients to participate in volunteer activities to build relationships with their neighbors. Not only was this outreach key to garnering support at the front end of the process, stakeholders agree this outreach and engagement must continue moving forward.

## **Developing a Collaborative Partnership with CDOC**

WAGEES brought CDOC staff, parole officers, and community partners together for the first time for a coordinated effort of this scale. Thus, a key component of its success was close collaboration between the community partners, the intermediary, and the CDOC. It was critical for the CDOC, especially parole officers, to trust the community partners, and vice versa, and for all parties to be seen as collaborators working toward the same goal.

Many of the community partners worked with justice-involved populations before WAGEES was launched but did not have experience working directly with parole officers or the CDOC. Initially, there was skepticism on both sides, a lack of support and trust between actors, and in some cases, overt resistance to the new grant program. Some parole officers had concerns about the services offered, and a few feared they would lose their jobs and be replaced by WAGEES community partners that were providing services for people returning from incarceration. To address some of these concerns, LCCL, the community partners, CDOC community reentry staff, and parole officers regularly met to review cases, communicate and coordinate resources, and share expertise.

Key to this new partnership was identifying and solidifying the complementary roles that the CDOC and WAGEES community partners could play in reentry. As the program developed, parole officers began to see the community partners as collaborators with valuable perspectives. The CDOC recognized that it could rely on WAGEES community partners as resources to fill service gaps and work toward the same goals. As part of their collaborative relationship, some community partners began to run the orientation meetings at the parole offices, providing perspectives and service offerings to people returning from incarceration. This relationship and mutual respect allows for a “warm handoff” from correctional officers to the community partners to ensure clients receive the support, services, and treatment they need.

LCCL provides credibility and capacity for WAGEES community partners and serves as a liaison and translator between the partners and the CDOC. The organization builds trust and garners support across state agencies and partner staff. Both partners and CDOC staff noted that the program most likely would not have been as successful without an intermediary to help define roles, build trust, engage multiple actors throughout the social service sector, and provide technical assistance. One example of this trust and support between community partners and the CDOC was an arrangement that allowed staff who had previously been incarcerated and were not under supervision to frequently enter correctional facilities, provide program orientation, and recruit people to participate. This was an exception to CDOC policies, and staff noted that this peer-to-peer outreach arrangement has not been allowed in any other cases.

## **Connecting the Dots between Community Partners and Building a Community of Practice**

Many of the community partners were not working together—or even aware of one another—until the WAGEES program was developed. As outlined in appendix A, the community partners vary in the

populations they serve, the services they provide, and their geographic location. With limited resources and large caseloads, the siloed nature of the social service landscape constituted a missed opportunity for collaboration. WAGEES helps fill this gap by enhancing communication and coordination within the social service sector and improving service provision. Community partners benefit, both in the number of referrals received and the increased communication and collaboration, from knowing the other service providers in the state. The CDOC and other state agencies also experience collateral benefits from this relationship. As CDOC staff engaged with the partners and began to understand the unique programs they offer, they learned to refer people leaving incarceration to community partners best positioned to serve their needs, reinforcing a cycle of culture change within the department. The WAGEES program creates a foundation for community partners to more effectively collaborate with the CDOC. The program helps ensure that people receive the tailored treatment and programming that will help them succeed.

The WAGEES program model has also helped facilitate a community of practice in which partners learn from one another and lean on each other in times of need. Each partner has an opportunity to find its niche within the broader social service provider landscape while capitalizing on the resources that other WAGEES partners provide (and making referrals as appropriate). Staff share information across organizations and can refer clients to partners who provide services they do not offer. The quarterly meetings are also an opportunity for community partners to engage in peer-to-peer learning. This collaborative relationship protects the WAGEES community partners from feeling that their resources are at risk because of competition with other service organizations and encourages collaboration when facing challenges.

## **Ensuring Flexibility**

The legislation that established the WAGEES program built in flexibility for the program to evolve based on the needs of the target population. This flexibility affords LCCL the discretion to make decisions about program management. LCCL troubleshoots with grantees to improve performance and build capacity and requires grantees to meet target goals to continue participation. The program's flexibility allows community partners to be more culturally sensitive and gives clients the chance to provide input on the best programming options. The program also encourages innovation in service delivery models and gives partners leeway to correct course when new strategies are not effective.

Clients choose to participate in WAGEES, a reflection of its community-based approach and “we are them, they are us” motto. This opt-in model ensures the relationship between people returning from

incarceration and the community partners is collaborative and adaptive, rather than adversarial and static. Although mandatory participation could add an element of enforcement that would reach a larger population, such an approach would be counter to the underlying tenets of the program.

## **Providing Strategic Funding Allocations**

Just as the community-based programming is tailored for each participant, the level of funding in each WAGEES grant is customized to match the capacity and need of each community partner. The WAGEES model is designed so funding allocations meet the needs of—but do not overwhelm—the partners, all of which are small, community-based organizations. The grants are sizable in relation to the typical funding streams the community partners receive, providing the opportunity to build and staff responsive programs. As stewards of public dollars, community partners receive manageable yet impactful grants and benefit from LCCL’s fiscal management oversight and support. Having a reliable, ongoing source of adequate funding provides stability for the community partners to offer uninterrupted services that are matched to individual client needs.

## **Barriers to Implementation**

As with any new program, WAGEES stakeholders and community partners have experienced challenges and hurdles related to implementation. Some of these challenges include funding delays and issues with communication, collaboration, participation in the program, data collection, service provision, and documentation. Community partners and stakeholders work together to overcome these barriers through collaborative problem-solving.

### **Funding Stream Delays**

As a new program, the WAGEES reimbursement funding structure presented some challenges during the first several months of implementation. Statutory language prevented the grant funds from being disbursed as an up-front payment or directly to LCCL, a process that would have provided more timely reimbursements. Some community partners had funding reserves or other alternative sources, such as business income or other grants, to supplement their WAGEES funding, but others were solely funded by WAGEES resources. In some cases, partners needed to take out loans or remortgage their own

houses for capital until reimbursement was received. Even with other sources of funding, it was difficult for some WAGEES community partners to raise the up-front capital needed to provide services to their clients. But as the program evolved, LCCL worked with the CDOC and the community partners to streamline the process and ensure quick processing and timely reimbursement. Although larger, more established organizations with larger reserves may not have faced these financial hurdles had they been selected as partners, Colorado stakeholders determined it was important to select partners engaged locally in their communities. In the sunset review of the WAGEES program, the Department of Regulatory Agencies recommended the CDOC “release up to one-quarter of grant funds to community partners at the beginning of the fiscal year,” which will provide partners with necessary up-front capital (Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies 2017, 21).

### **Messaging and Communicating to the Community at Large to Address Stigmatization of the Client Population**

As community-based organizations, WAGEES partners live in the neighborhoods they serve and must be sensitive to how their work and client base is perceived. Some community members are not open to the idea of having previously incarcerated people, especially those convicted of violent or sex offenses, in their neighborhood. This leaves the community partners in a challenging situation, and they must balance providing space and services for people reentering the community with the needs and views of community members. Some community members do not appreciate the need for vital reentry services to support people transitioning out of prison. And although some community members may understand the value of this work, they may also have concerns about crime and other disruption. As such, some partners were hesitant to publicize their work or the people they serve, realizing the community may not be accepting of their services. To try to overcome this hurdle and stigmatization, some hold community events to help people understand the work being carried out, and others offer clients opportunities to engage in volunteer work to help the larger community.

### **Providing for People Who Self-Select into the Program**

Although stakeholders view the voluntary nature of the WAGEES program as a positive and essential component of the model, it does limit the pool of potential clients and the partners’ ability to ensure compliance with program requirements. As noted above, parole officers can refer people to WAGEES partners or people can opt in themselves; either way, participation in the program is strictly voluntary.

Once people are released from prison and referred to the program, it is their responsibility to visit the community partner, sign up for the program, and follow the service plan. Partner staff and parole officers work together to encourage people to follow through with programming, but there are no penalties for not participating.

## **Overcoming Gaps in Housing Provision**

Colorado is facing a lack of affordable housing, which makes it difficult for people, especially those returning from incarceration, to find a place to live. Some partners provide housing in the building where services are provided, similar to a dormitory. Others rent entire houses for clients to live in and manage. But in some cases, there are no housing options available for their clients, presenting a major barrier to longer-term stability. Even for community partners that do have housing options, there often is not enough space for all their clients. To provide a little support and stability, some community partners offer emergency assistance to fund shelter fees and, in some instances, short-term hotel stays of one or two weeks. This assistance is useful to people who have just returned from incarceration but does not contribute to sustained stability.

## **Using Data Systems and Reaching Performance Metrics Goals**

WAGEES community partners are required to collect, input, and report data on a set of metrics in order to receive funding. Although performance reporting is critical for program oversight, some partners had no experience collecting data and reported challenges using Apricot. LCCL provides technical assistance to partners to simplify processes, prepare and analyze data, and support and train staff to ensure unified and timely reporting. LCCL teaches community partners how to use the data to improve service provision, increasing data fidelity and grantee buy-in. These metrics are also used to flag issues that need to be addressed. For example, one issue uncovered by the data reporting system was a lack of CDOC referrals to some community partners. To ensure that partners were not missing opportunities to be matched with clients who would benefit from their services, LCCL worked with CDOC staff to understand the reason behind the lack of referrals and monitored the metrics to ensure the numbers increased.



## Documenting Long-Term Success

All programs, especially newly established ones, struggle to document and disseminate success, making it difficult to build the case for continued support and funding. WAGEES requires partners to collect and report on a limited range of key metrics to ensure that grantees are accountable for their outcomes. Community partners can often see the impact of the services they provide firsthand, but they find it hard to capture individual success stories in high-level data to communicate the importance and impact of the program to stakeholders.

Community partners offer a long list of services to deliver wraparound support and conduct regular check-ins with clients to ensure stability. Because of the high demand for services that exceeds their current capacity, it is difficult for case managers to continue checking in with clients after they complete programming or discontinue program participation. WAGEES grantees can provide an initial support system for people returning from prison, but if clients no longer want to participate after their immediate needs are met, staff have no mechanism to support their long-term success.

Stability and recidivism reduction are key components of the program, but they cannot be measured comprehensively because data are not collected once someone ends their participation in the program. This logistical hurdle is one of the challenges WAGEES community partners face when trying to document and report on success across the system. To help address this data gap, the CDOC is exploring ways to link WAGEES and state data to allow analysts to examine long-term outcomes, such as arrests or returns to prison for a new crime or technical violations, once someone completes the program.

## Next Steps for Colorado: The Crime Prevention Initiative

Drawing on the support and promising start of WAGEES, in 2017, CCJRC helped develop and support the passage of HB17-1326, the Justice Reinvestment Crime Prevention Initiative, to reinvest savings from criminal justice reforms to fund community-based crime prevention strategies.<sup>9</sup> The legislation is twofold: (1) enacting parole reforms and (2) establishing a new grant program and a small-business lending program to improve quality of life, safety, and opportunity in two neighborhoods that have historically experienced higher rates of crime and criminal justice system involvement.

As a first step, the legislation imposes a revocation cap for some offenses, which limits the number of days a person on parole may be reincarcerated for a technical violation. As a result of the reforms and the discontinuation of an ineffective parole program, the state projected annual savings in the prison

budget of \$6,628,401.<sup>10</sup> The second piece of the legislation establishes a Justice Reinvestment Crime Prevention Initiative in the Department of Local Affairs. The department will partner with a community foundation and several community development financial institutions to fund pilot crime prevention initiatives in two communities: North Aurora and Southeast Colorado Springs. The financial institutions will provide small-business lending in those communities. On the programmatic side, the community foundation will serve as the intermediary for a new grant program that establishes local planning teams to develop crime prevention priorities. Strategies will be determined by the teams and can include improving academic achievement, providing direct services, increasing the use of outdoor and common spaces, and other priorities. Because community members are intimately involved with the needs of their communities, they provide unique perspective concerning the strategies that will have a crime prevention benefit. The community foundation is also responsible for contracting with a third-party evaluator. HB17-1326 is designed as a three-year pilot, and \$4 million a year will be appropriated. The savings realized from parole reforms will be appropriated to DOLA to carry out the grant and small-business lending programs. Although similar in nature to WAGEES in that it encourages the community to act as the driving force for the programs, the Crime Prevention Initiative goes beyond solutions that have been traditionally supported in the criminal justice space. The program will also foster strategies to prevent crime and address other problems the community prioritizes through noncriminal justice interventions.

## A New Vision for Public Safety Investment

Colorado's WAGEES program is an innovative justice reinvestment strategy that directs money from the CDOC to affected communities and empowers community partners to play a more active role in developing solutions to public safety problems. Although it is still in its early phases, this program model is promising and offers a number of lessons for other states interested in justice reinvestment to strengthen communities. WAGEES shows how expanding public safety investment to include community organizations can increase cooperation and collaboration among previously unconnected groups; develop a community of partners that share information, lessons learned, and challenges; and demonstrate the importance of incorporating a strong and experienced intermediary. Staff at the WAGEES community partners, many of whom have been directly involved in the justice system themselves, understand the unique needs of the clients they serve, and the program helps engage stakeholders, legislators, and community members to improve the reentry process.

Although the parties involved in WAGEES faced challenges during implementation, they built a trusting and collaborative relationship that facilitates problem-solving. As a testament to the success

and impact WAGEES has demonstrated, an October 2017 report recommended WAGEES be continued until 2023 (Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies 2017). Challenges are to be expected with a new program, but they provide an opportunity to shape the program in a way that would be most beneficial to the clients and help them “not just reenter, but reintegrate” people exiting prison into the community.<sup>11</sup>

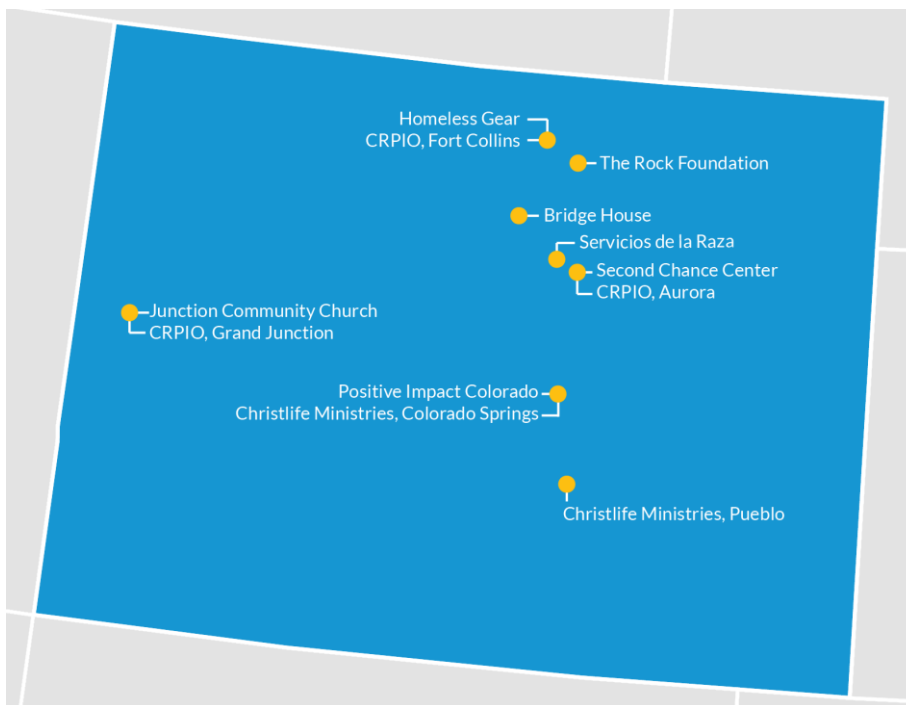
As jurisdictions across the country consider how to invest their public safety resources most effectively, WAGEES offers an example of the benefits of bringing community partners to the table in support of that goal. Community organizations reside in the neighborhoods they serve, building trust with local residents and offering opportunities for neighbors to help realize their strategies for better public safety. In addition, these organizations provide services that are critical to public safety but fall outside the traditional purview of law enforcement and corrections agencies, such as health care and behavioral health treatment, employment assistance, and trauma-informed case management. State and local governments can leverage and enhance local organizations’ expertise, relationships, and capabilities by including them in public safety budget planning processes, providing funding to support their activities and engaging them as partners in addressing local needs.

# Appendix A. Descriptions of the WAGEES Community Partners

The following community- and faith-based grassroots organizations engaged in the WAGEES grant program at some point between its inception in January 2015 to present. All community partners closely collaborate with the Colorado Department of Corrections to provide reentry services. The services they provide in general, not just for the WAGEES program, as well as the total number of clients served as of September 30, 2017, are outlined below.

FIGURE A.1

## Locations of WAGEES Partners



### The Rock Foundation

Greeley, CO

September 2015 to present

Number of clients: 97

The Rock Foundation is a homegrown nonprofit providing services for people returning from incarceration. A unique part of the Rock Foundation is its two social enterprises that employ people to provide wages, prosocial mentoring, and a source of income to support the organization. These

businesses are a BBQ truck and furniture workshop. In addition to employment opportunities, the Rock Foundation also provides peer mentorship, group therapy, Moral Reconciliation Therapy, and employment preparation. It also provides housing for approximately 20 people.

**Community Re-Entry Place Inside/Out**

Fort Collins, Grand Junction, and Aurora, CO

<http://insideoutministry.net>

Fort Collins: September 2015 to September 2017

Grand Junction: September 2015 to July 2017

Aurora: September 2015 to September 2017

Number of clients: 303

Community Re-Entry Place Inside/Out (CRPIO) offers services in Fort Collins and Aurora specifically for formerly incarcerated people as a path toward reintegration into the community. It also partners with another faith-based organization in Grand Junction. CRPIO provides transitional housing as well as immediate needs such as identification and clothing, counseling, educational attainment services, transportation services, and behavioral health programs.

**Bridge House**

Boulder, CO

<https://boulderbridgehouse.org>

January 2015 to present

Number of clients: 43

The Bridge House is an organization providing people facing homelessness and poverty with housing, employment, and support services, and it recently began to carve out specific services for people returning from incarceration. The Bridge House was formed in 2012 and began providing transitional housing and started the Ready to Work program in 2015. Approximately a third of the beds available are for people returning from incarceration, but it provides the same services regardless of whether people are or are not returning from incarceration to encourage integration. Bridge House residents are employed up to 29 hours a week in one of its social enterprises providing supplemental sanitation and landscaping or culinary arts in the community.

**Servicios de la Raza**

Denver, CO

<http://serviciosdelaraza.org>

January 2015 to present

Number of clients: 236

Servicios de la Raza, formed in 1972, provides support services for community members, including employment services, HIV/AIDS services, services for survivors of domestic violence, and mental health

and substance use services. Additionally, it provides specific services for people returning from incarceration, but these people also have access to the wide array of other services. Servicios de la Raza aims to empower the community by providing educational employment services for participants and offering services to youth in the community.

#### **Christlife Ministries**

Pueblo and Colorado Springs, CO

<http://mychristlife.org>

Pueblo: January 2015 to present

Colorado Springs: July 2017 to present

Number of clients: 221

Christlife Ministries focuses its services on people returning from incarceration by providing wraparound support, Moral Reconciliation Therapy, Parents on a Mission, work readiness classes, life skills programs, Supplemental Security Income benefits support, vocational training, and therapy. It also offers housing to people to provide stability and support during reentry.

#### **Positive Impact Colorado**

Colorado Springs, CO

<http://positiveimpactco.org/>

September 2015 to June 2017

Number of clients: 138

Positive Impact was formed in 2005 as a response to the relocation of Hurricane Katrina survivors and has since provided services to people returning from incarceration. It provides education services and assistance, Moral Reconciliation Therapy, and employment services. The nonprofit also connects people to social safety net benefits and partners with a local workforce development center to provide employment opportunities.

#### **Second Chance Center**

Aurora, CO

<https://www.scccolorado.org>

January 2015 to present

Number of clients: 798

The Second Chance Center, started in 2012, provides cognitive restructuring, addiction counseling and support groups, mentoring, transportation, and employment preparation, among other services, to formerly incarcerated people. It provides client-centered support while engaging families to help reduce a person's likelihood to recidivate. Many staff members were previously incarcerated and can provide relevant experience to support people returning to the community.

**Junction Community Church**

Grand Junction, CO

<http://jctcc.net>

July 2017 to present

Number of clients: 17

Junction Community Church offers a variety of services to people returning from incarceration, such as education, training and employment assistance, housing assistance, access to food and clothing banks, and supportive services such as transportation and help obtaining identification.

**Homeless Gear**

Fort Collins, CO

<http://homelessgear.org>

September 2017 to present

Number of clients: 21

Homeless Gear is the lead agency facilitating collaboration among 17 independent community providers offering 38 programs and supports to people and families who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless. Collectively, organizations provide a wide variety of programs to help returning citizens meet their basic needs, including mail and laundry service, clothing, food, and housing assistance. This is in addition to services that help with entry to employment, such as training and education assistance and placement services.

# Appendix B. Key Findings

Colorado's experience with WAGEES illustrates one community partnership model that other jurisdictions can learn from. Key findings include the following:

- The role of an intermediary is crucial.
- Community partners should reflect the populations they serve.
- Local community advocacy organizations can be catalysts and create momentum for change.
- Building relationships across agencies, communities, and people most impacted by the criminal justice system is key to success.
- Sharing information across partners and within the community fosters shared goals and a culture of building knowledge.
- Each community has unique needs and, as such, programs should give community partners the opportunity to address those needs in a way best suited to the community.
- Funding should provide community partners with the resources and support to build capacity to meet the needs of the community.
- As the program reflects the community needs, funding should reflect the community partners' need for regular and timely payment because they are often organizations with smaller financial capacity.
- Engaging with the community at large through community events or open houses lets community partners message the program and services in a way best suited to their communities.
- Collecting and synthesizing relevant and useful data creates opportunities to demonstrate successful outcomes.
- Community partners are not able—and should not be expected—to provide every service a person needs upon reentry, but they should use the resources available to offer what services they can.



# Notes

<sup>1</sup> Laura Kurgan, Eric Cadora, David Reinfurt, Sarah Williams, and Leah Meisterlin, “Million Dollar Blocks,” accessed January 10, 2018, <http://spatialinformationdesignlab.org/projects.php%3Fid%3D16>.

<sup>2</sup> This report reflects the experiences of the seven community partners engaged in the WAGEES grant program as of May 2017. A full list of community partners engaged with the program at some point from its inception to the publication of this report can be found in appendix A. After May 2017, two partners discontinued their participation. Two new organizations submitted proposals and were selected to provide services at those locations.

<sup>3</sup> H.B. 14-1355, 69th Gen Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2014).

<sup>4</sup> “HB 14-1355 Final Fiscal Note,” Colorado Legislative Council Staff, July 23, 2014, [http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2014a/csl.nsf/billcontainers/535B1BDD5BE99FC187257CA7005A703E/\\$FILE/HB1355\\_f1.pdf](http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2014a/csl.nsf/billcontainers/535B1BDD5BE99FC187257CA7005A703E/$FILE/HB1355_f1.pdf); “SB 15-124 Final Fiscal Note,” Colorado Legislative Council Staff, October 13, 2015, [http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2015a/csl.nsf/fsbillcont3/0FBB07461F36BEFB87257DB10065DA22?Open&file=SB124\\_f1.pdf](http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2015a/csl.nsf/fsbillcont3/0FBB07461F36BEFB87257DB10065DA22?Open&file=SB124_f1.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> From LCCL quarterly progress report through September 30, 2017. Recidivism is only tracked while a participant is active in the program, and comparisons to the department’s recidivism rate should not be made. As noted on page 16, the CDOC and LCCL are exploring ways to connect state and WAGEES partner data to examine longer-term outcomes.

<sup>6</sup> From LCCL quarterly progress report through June 30, 2017. Metrics used originally from the US Department of Labor Reentry Project.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Hassan Latif, Second Chance Center executive director, May 19, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> H.B. 17-1326, 71st Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Conversation with a WAGEES community partner, May 2017.

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# COMMUNITY-DRIVEN MODELS FOR SAFETY AND JUSTICE

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## **Abstract**

The U.S. criminal justice system is defined and fueled by foundations and principles that uphold harmful power dynamics such as white supremacy, further destabilizing communities that face intersecting structural barriers. This paternalistic system is characterized by the imposition of punishments—including fees, fines, penalties, and deprivation of freedom and even life—that are meted out disproportionately to people of color and people living in poverty. More often than not, policymakers and justice practitioners fail to solicit the views, experiences, and expertise of community members and justice system-involved individuals, leading to policies and practices crafted under the auspices of promoting safety that undermine community stability instead. Consistent with Square One’s charge to “reimagine how we create justice,” this paper describes approaches that communities around the country employ to craft, lead, and participate in their own public safety strategies. The paper will offer examples of crime prevention work, investment and divestment efforts, and policy reform initiatives developed and guided by people most likely to experience crime and the heavy hammer of the traditional justice system. This paper will explore the promises, strengths, and challenges associated with each approach, presenting a range of creative strategies for residents—in partnership with the broader community of advocates, activists, and researchers—to adapt, own, and implement.

**Keywords:** Community organizing, Grassroots Leadership, Justice Reform, Public Safety

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since its inception, the criminal justice system in the United States has been punitive, reactive, and grounded in racism (See, e.g., Scott Christianson, *With Liberty for Some: 500 Years of Imprisonments in America*. Boston: Northeastern University Press. 1998.). Our top-down approach to public safety has exacerbated racial inequalities, magnified other social and economic inequities, and yielded costly and destructive outcomes for

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individuals, families, communities, and the country overall. Indeed, the current justice system is entrenched in self-perpetuating race and class power structures that destabilize communities and undermine safety. The criminal justice system's negative outcomes have not gone unnoticed by policymakers. The majority of states have passed justice reform measures, and jurisdictions around the country are pursuing local jail reform and reentry efforts<sup>1</sup> (Harvell et al., 2016; NIC 2007). Yet for the most part, these reforms chip away at the margins, create unintended consequences, and fail to address racially disparate impacts. Too often, such reform processes do not center—or even include—members of communities most likely to experience both crime and the heavy hammer of the criminal justice system (Urban Institute 2018).

We can do better by advancing justice policy reform, envisioning and building new safety strategies under the leadership of those most impacted by public safety issues: survivors of crime, those who have direct experience in the justice system, and people residing in communities where safety is a daily concern and where police pose a distinct threat to their civil liberties and lives. This community-driven approach to public safety will more effectively identify and address the underlying causes of crime and racial injustice, resulting in solutions that respect humanity, restore dignity, and repair harms. Fortunately, we are not required to start at square one to imagine more equitable and just strategies to make communities safe and strong. Throughout the country, communities have already been doing the work of redefining the way they approach and advance public safety initiatives.

People central to public safety challenges are central to finding solutions, and this paper describes ways to facilitate that process. While this community-driven approach represents a dramatic shift from traditional institutional justice system efforts, promising models and innovations exist all over the country. This paper describes five key elements of community-driven public safety. We discuss considerations for identifying stakeholder groups, catalog the data and information that can inform priorities and solutions, discuss strategies for broader community engagement, and describe the ways in which efforts can be assessed, adapted, supported, and sustained. We conclude with a call to action, encouraging advocates, activists, philanthropists, public officials, and the research community to promote community-led decision making as an essential element of building a safer, more just, and more equitable society.

## **ELEMENT ONE: THE COMMUNITY IS IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT**

Community-driven public safety efforts center around directly-impacted stakeholders, operating on the principle that the people who are most proximate to the challenges at hand must also be most proximate to the solutions. It is essential to define who these key stakeholders are, and doing so requires a careful consideration of context. For example, communities can be based on geography, residency, native language, shared identity, membership in an organization or faith community, or common experience. In many cases, the people who have the most direct experience with safety challenges are also the most historically disenfranchised, including Black, Latinx, and Native American communities and low-income communities. Often, people who commit crimes that harm others are also victims themselves, a critical nuance that does not align with the traditional victim/perpetrator dichotomies of the criminal justice system. These essential stakeholders have been largely excluded from mainstream public safety policy conversations while bearing the brunt of the negative consequences of over-policing and mass surveillance and incarceration. Community-driven public safety, or community justice, offers an alternative path that runs contrary

to traditional power structures, focusing on generating creative solutions by following the leadership of the people closest to public safety challenges (Karp and Clear, 2000).

In addition to the ideological and moral case to be made for centering communities in public safety decision making, there are important practical and strategic benefits. First, these communities hold a wealth of information about how to address pressing issues, and ignoring that expertise is a missed opportunity. Indeed, many communities have developed indigenous solutions that have largely gone unrecognized by the broader field. In addition, a growing body of research documents how community-driven problem-solving processes carry their own benefits that extend beyond the outcome of any given effort. For example, organizations that foster collective efficacy and social cohesion can contribute to decreased levels of crime (Wo 2014).

While some community-driven processes are developed and implemented exclusively by community members themselves, others offer opportunities for partnership with organizations, institutions, and governments at the state, local, and even federal levels. Centering community stakeholders in justice reform efforts requires these partnerships to be structured intentionally, respecting the leadership of community players rather than including them as an afterthought. Simply put, a community-driven approach to public safety requires public officials, policymakers, and other leaders to be open and receptive to finding new and creative ways to step back and follow the community's lead to implement bottom-up solutions.

## **ELEMENT TWO: RESIDENTS HAVE A STRUCTURE AND PROCESS TO IDENTIFY PRIORITIES**

As with any problem-solving process involving multiple stakeholders, community-driven safety and justice efforts require organizational structures and processes to solicit input, guide decision making, and help identify priorities and action steps. Actors who are indigenous or external to the community can facilitate such efforts. Examples of various models, processes, and facilitators illustrate the value of both grassroots and intermediary-led strategies.

### **Organizing and Coalition Structure**

Community-led justice approaches can be organized through a variety of mechanisms, from organic grassroots movements grounded in community-level advocacy to those facilitated by a third-party intermediary. They can vary considerably based on who is involved, what organizational and management structure is used, the decision-making process followed, and the scope and timeline. Community-led approaches may emerge from a specific advocacy goal, or from a broader focus on justice reform or larger public safety goals. Indeed, the impetus for launching such an effort may define the people involved and the timeline for decision making and action.

These characteristics of organizational and management structure and processes may either engender or inhibit inclusivity of diverse membership and a democratic process of input and engagement. Moreover, a tension can exist between structuring the organizing process to promote inclusive decision making and ensuring the decisions are made in a timely manner that is best able to influence the intended outcome. For example, an advocacy effort established to inform the selection of a new police chief is by definition time-bound and requires judicious solicitation of community input in order to influence decision making during the period of recruiting and vetting of prospective candidates.

Passionate and dedicated community members typically initiate these grassroots efforts, which can grow into a larger coalition of concerned residents aspiring for political



action or change. In Chicago, IL, the No Cop Academy<sup>2</sup> movement was established by Black youth and other youth of color to push back against the city's plan to build a \$95 million police academy, making the case that the money should instead be dedicated to community priorities like public schools and mental health services. These Chicago organizers used the capital investment project proposal to spark a broader discussion about resource allocation and community priorities, and successfully build a broad coalition that included dozens of local advocacy groups.

### **Intermediary Facilitation**

Third parties, or intermediaries, can also support communities in initiating and organizing community-led efforts. These actors can be local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as community foundations, local nonprofits, or established advocacy groups, or they could be researchers, or even public agencies. Participatory budgeting<sup>3</sup> is one example of an intermediary-guided model, established with the specific aim of facilitating a process in which community members drive decision making on spending priorities. Often supported through technical assistance from a trained consultant, local community groups can seek guidance and develop strategies to play a key role in determining priorities for some portion of a jurisdiction's budget. The process can be initiated by community members or by public officials interested in a higher level of community engagement. The priorities are identified through a democratic process driven by a steering committee of community members who brainstorm priorities, develop proposals, and oversee the process in which residents vote on solutions that the government has committed to fund. The City of Vallejo, CA, engaged in such a process that resulted in street repairs, park improvements, community gardens, and college scholarships.<sup>4</sup>

Participatory justice, as articulated in a concept paper developed under the auspices of the U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty, has its foundation in participatory budgeting. It aims to support residents of neighborhoods most affected by concentrated poverty, crime and violence, and criminal justice system presence in defining how safety should be delivered in their communities, and to make government systems responsive to that vision. The model involves: engagement with an organization of residents of neighborhoods most affected by crime and heavy criminal justice system activity; a democratic process of identifying alternative strategies for delivering safety and justice; and the commitment of a government partner to implement the identified community priorities through spending and/or policy changes. Data analysis of both the status quo and proposed new policies, and ongoing evaluation of the process, its implementation, and its impact, are also components of the model.

### **Process Considerations**

Regardless of whether the community-driven process is led by residents on their own or in partnership with an intermediary, process considerations regarding who participates, how their input is solicited, and how decisions are made can present unique challenges and opportunities. Group membership will vary from entity to entity, but it almost always runs the risk of being dominated by a select few who likely do not represent all views held among community members. Older retired women, for example, may have a preference for different types of strategies than young men in their twenties. This dynamic underscores the importance of recruiting people who represent an array of community interests. Anticipating and addressing issues such as how the effort is advertised (e.g., online or hard copy fliers), where and during what hours of the day convenings will occur, whether buildings and spaces are accessible, whether food or

childcare will be provided, and how language barriers and fear of exposure to system actors (e.g., among undocumented populations) will be navigated, is critical to ensure that diverse aspects of community interest are represented.

Once an array of community members is recruited for participation, similar considerations are required to ensure that they have meaningful opportunities to weigh in on decision making. Far too often, decisions within democratic processes are overly influenced by self-appointed leaders who have had the most experience participating in community meetings, eclipsing other critical perspectives, including those from people with the least political capital or those most likely to have direct experience with the criminal justice system. Overcoming this barrier to participation requires creative strategies to engage all people involved, and may include breaking up into smaller groups, conducting and sharing results of stakeholder interviews, and taking straw polls or using live polling technology.

Relatedly, decisions about who facilitates group discussions and how decisions are ultimately made can influence group processes and results. Third party intermediaries may be helpful as trained facilitators, but they may also introduce new power dynamics, impacting who is driving the conversation and whether the community is ultimately truly guiding the process. Moreover, the demographics (such as age, race, or gender) and positional power of the person or people facilitating the conversations can also influence the process and outcomes. Similarly, the process of group decision making can introduce biases, depending on how conversations are facilitated and decisions are made, particularly when not all participants agree on the nature of the problem or the best possible solution. While pros and cons exist for any approach to group decision making, processes that are informed by information and evidence give community members a strong foundation from which to reach their own conclusions.

### **ELEMENT THREE: COMMUNITIES HAVE THE INFORMATION NEEDED TO GENERATE SOLUTIONS AND MEASURE IMPACTS**

Regardless of the organizing structure of the community-led approach, all successful efforts need information to identify priorities and inform solutions. Information for these efforts usually takes one of three forms: expertise based on direct experience with the justice system and public safety challenges; survey data representative of the views of residents; or administrative data and related measures collected by agencies including justice system actors. Critical information can also be generated and gathered through methods that are less traditional to research and policy strategy, such as cultural and spiritual practices or community arts projects designed to enhance public safety and community wellbeing (Treskon et al., 2018). Decisions surrounding which information to use, and how to gather and interpret that information, are necessary precursors for charting solutions. Employing mixed methods approaches that draw on multiple information sources can fuel particularly rich analyses to guide decision making.

#### **First-Person Expertise**

Personal narratives reflecting the perceptions and experiences of those exposed to safety and justice issues are an important component of any community-led initiative because they provide critical contextual insights and can be persuasive in advocacy efforts. Simply put, soliciting and sharing community knowledge is crucial for understanding the challenges at hand and beginning to build solutions. The Essie Justice Group report (Clayton et al., 2018) representing the experiences of women with incarcerated loved ones is an example of how first-hand expertise is essential to understand of the impact of punitive justice policies on families and intimate partners on the outside.

This knowledge based on direct experience can be gathered from different stakeholders in a variety of ways, and collecting this often-sensitive information requires careful consideration of methods. To ensure broad representation, narratives can be solicited from a variety of community members representing an array of experiences, whether those are about interactions with law enforcement, fear of crime or other harm, personal victimization, or direct experiences with prison, jail, or community supervision. Interviews, focus groups, and community forums are all examples of strategies to solicit and gather perspectives from different stakeholder groups. Across all these approaches, it is important to recognize that people need to feel safe and respected in order to share this critical information, as these populations often face stigma and the experience of expressing their views can be extremely burdensome.

### **Survey Data**

Survey data, by contrast, can be designed to be representative of the entire community. However, selection bias whereby respondents represent just a subpopulation (for example, more affluent residents with higher levels of education) is a very real concern and is more likely to skew results when surveys are administered by mail, email, or online. Door-to-door surveys are the best means of soliciting input that represents all residents in a community of interest, and surveys conducted by people residing in the surveyed neighborhoods or in communities that are demographically similar are more likely to yield adequate response rates and candid responses.

In Tucson, AZ, staff from the Arizona office of the American Friends Services Committee, a nonprofit dedicated to reducing the footprint of the criminal justice system, worked with youth organizers in the city to document community members' views on safety. They fielded a survey in both English and Spanish to capture residents' perceptions of community safety and preferences for strategies to enhance safety in their neighborhoods. These youth led the survey effort at every stage, collecting and vetting the questions, distributing the survey, and determining how to use results.

While surveys can be a powerful means of ascertaining the views and experiences of people who are often not represented in other ways, using survey data alone, absent engagement among community members to interpret and provide context to this information, can result in misleading findings. Community Data Walks to discuss and interpret data can be a good strategy for residents to engage information and collectively develop key takeaways (Murray et al., 2015). In Austin, TX, a project called Community Voices, launched by the Austin Justice Coalition in partnership with the Urban Institute, employed a data walk to interpret the results of in-person interviews conducted by local residents via household canvassing. The survey focused on members of a heavily-policed, predominantly Latinx community, who were asked about their views of, and experiences with, police and public safety. During the data walk, community members were particularly struck by the fact that younger survey respondents had dramatically different views of the police than those over the age of forty. The data walk process also led to policy recommendations around police de-escalation methods and community engagement strategies.

### **Data on the Criminal Justice System**

Access to and use of data generated by criminal justice system and other agency players—including police, the courts, and corrections agencies—is critical to informing and empowering actors from communities most affected by the system's extensive reach. These data sources can provide useful context regarding current practice, for example,

where, when, and how often police engage in use of force or stop and frisk tactics. However, the availability of relevant data is highly varied. These data systems are often managed by the same institutions that community-led efforts seek to disrupt or reform. And even when accessed, data can be difficult and costly to clean, analyze, and visualize, particularly on an ongoing basis.

The National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP) is a network of local data intermediaries dedicated to democratizing information to give residents and community organizations a stronger voice in improving their neighborhoods. Local NNIP partners build and operate an information system with recurrently updated data on neighborhood conditions across topics. They also help community and government leaders use data in community building and local policymaking, and leverage this information to build the capacities of institutions and residents in low-income neighborhoods. Rise, the local NNIP partner in St. Louis, MO, teamed with CivTech St. Louis to enable easy access for residents to obtain ticket information in St. Louis County. The YourSTLCourts.com website and related text tool help residents navigate the court system with the goal of preventing jail time for non-violent traffic offenses. More recently, NNIP has partnered with the Microsoft Cities Team to launch a cross-site initiative on criminal justice data collection in the advocacy landscape (NNIP 2018). The project will focus on police practices and court systems, which are aspects of the criminal justice system that are typically under-developed in the use of local data to mobilize reform.

Criminal justice system data is not always available, either because agencies are not collecting it routinely or because they are unwilling to share it. Given these challenges, resources such as Mapping Police Violence and emerging efforts such as Data for Black Lives are dedicated to increasing transparency and data accessibility to advance racial justice and social change.<sup>5</sup> Another innovative approach is the Courtwatch model, which recruits volunteers from the community to sit in on court proceedings, collect data on decisions, narratives, and context, and share observations to promote oversight, accountability and reform. Courtwatch models may be specific to certain types of cases, such as supporting survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault; documenting proceedings of child custody, abuse, and neglect cases; or may be more comprehensive in nature.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of the source of data on the criminal justice system and public safety concerns, making this information available to community-led partnerships for further use ensures that the effort is not entirely dependent on the accessibility and cooperation of system actors, who often are the gatekeepers for this information. It can also be valuable to engage in partnership with researchers who can help community-led reform efforts analyze and employ data in support of their advocacy work.

### **Community-Researcher Partnerships**

One model for data generation and interpretation in support of community priorities is community based participatory research (CBPR) (Minkler et al., 2012). CBPR is a community-led and researcher-guided data collection, analysis, decision making, and evaluation process that uses research tools and strategies to better understand community problems, priorities, and potential solutions. For example, a collaboration among academic researchers and community members to develop a youth violence prevention after-school program used focus groups to solicit input, involved pilot testing of the after-school program, and included organizational assessments of candidate after-school program sites (Leff et al., 2010). The systematic data collection and analysis approach supported by the research partners led to a revised program to extend its reach, expand its capacity, and promote sustainability.

Another example of CBPR is a project in Miami Gardens and Opa-locka, FL, in which researchers from the local university collaborated with city schools, police, and community-based service providers to develop and use standardized methods of data collection and analysis for problem identification and assessment of interventions. Researchers were able to document that youth who participated in the out-of-school suspension program had improved attitudes about violence and risky behaviors, and that community engagement activities increased adult residents' civic engagement in violence prevention efforts.

First-hand expertise, diverse community perceptions and opinions, and administrative data can all play key roles in informing solutions. The next step is to ensure that stakeholders have access to the partners and resources they need to advance them.

#### **ELEMENT FOUR: STAKEHOLDERS HAVE A PLATFORM FOR ENGAGEMENT**

People at the heart of community-driven public safety work require access to the partners necessary to advance solutions. In some cases, this engagement occurs primarily among neighbors or other community members. In other cases, engagement involves bringing a community-driven framework to ongoing interaction or collaboration between community members and more traditional justice system institutions and actors. We examine both dynamics here.

##### **Change Initiatives Within a Community**

In some communities, this work is done on the level of a neighborhood or even a single city block among stakeholders who are all proximate to the challenge at hand. For example, Mothers Against Senseless Killing members in Chicago, IL have long watched over their own neighborhoods, developing strategic youth engagement tactics to proactively address persistent violence (Manasseh 2017). Community bail funds like the one in Brooklyn, NY, are another such example in which organizers draw from a broader support network to pool resources to free people who are awaiting trial in jail because they cannot afford bail.<sup>7</sup>

Even within communities facing pressing public safety concerns, engagement across different stakeholder groups can be an important step in advancing solutions. The Boston TenPoint Coalition was formed when local clergy began mobilizing their communities to directly respond to pressing youth violence concerns. While the TenPoint Coalition used a variety of strategies, members' night walks through high-crime neighborhoods to engage residents who were out late, including gang members and people at risk of violent victimization, were perhaps the most well-known. In a TED talk with well over one million views, TenPoint Coalition leader Rev. Jeffrey Brown described how the night walks were designed to build trust with community members who had expertise that was essential for developing solutions:

“We said to them, ‘We don’t know our own communities... between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m., but you do. You are the subject matter experts, if you will, of that period of time. So talk to us. Teach us. Help us to see what we’re not seeing. Help us to understand what were not understanding’” (Brown 2015).

In all these approaches that take place within communities, leaders rely on their social capital and close proximity the challenge at hand to build and advance collaborative solutions.

## Engaging with Traditional Justice System Actors

Often, leaders of community-driven strategies engage traditional justice system players to different degrees to advance solutions. In some cases, this engagement primarily consists of an initial referral from law enforcement to divert people from traditional justice system tracks into more community-centered strategies. A new proposal within this category is the Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board (NOAB) model, currently in development with pilot sites in California (Muhammad 2018). Under this model, law enforcement or community members refer youth who have engaged in harmful or destructive behavior to a NOAB composed of a wide range of local residents including youth, community leaders, clergy, business owners, and people who have experienced victimization and prior justice system involvement alike. The NOAB will be responsible for understanding the incident and crafting and overseeing a community-based action plan designed to foster accountability and repair harm. For programs such as NOABs to succeed, community leaders and law enforcement must build and foster reciprocal trust, establishing a shared understanding that the community can be in a stronger position to address and repair harm than traditional justice system institutions and processes.

Other community-driven efforts require more ongoing collaboration between local community members, grassroots organizations, and traditional justice system actors. For example, the Participatory Defense model helps community members actively participate in defense efforts for people facing charges (Jayadev 2019). While participatory defense processes begin with families and friends organizing in community meetings, participants can also work with public defenders as key allies for collaboratively devising a holistic defense strategy. Another example is the Work and Gain Employment and Education Skills (WAGEES) program, which the Colorado legislature created in 2014 to improve reentry for people coming home from prison. This program is a partnership between the Colorado Department of Correction (CDOC) and a network of community-based service providers, many of which are led by people with firsthand experience navigating the criminal justice system and reentry process. CDOC provides the grant funding for the community providers, and an intermediary organization, the Latino Coalition for Community Leadership (LCCL) administers the program by selecting grantees, handling resource allocation, overseeing reporting requirements, and providing technical assistance and support to grant recipients. Many referrals come from parole officers, who often work closely with the community providers to engage in case management and troubleshoot challenges that arise. It took time to build the trust between parole officers and community providers that is required for close collaboration, and LCCL played a key role in facilitating communication and providing oversight and support as these working relationships were forged and solidified. The success of the WAGEES program has paved the way for several subsequent community-centered public safety programs in Colorado, including Transforming Safety and the newest Community Crime Victims Grant Program.

Some community-driven public safety efforts that require close collaboration with traditional public safety players have been slower to come to fruition, a testament to the challenges of this work. With broad support from community organizers and activists, the Council of the District of Columbia passed the Neighborhood Engagement Achieves Results (NEAR) Act of 2016<sup>8</sup> to respond to heightened violence in D.C. with a community public health-based approach. The wide-ranging NEAR Act provisions include creating new government offices to staff violence interruption efforts, funding new community partnerships, increased police transparency and data collection requirements, and an investigation by a new Community Policing Working Group.

While the NEAR Act was fully funded in fiscal year 2018, several of the provisions have not yet been fully implemented, particularly the requirements regarding collecting and reporting police stop and frisk data. This lack of implementation progress sparked a lawsuit filed in D.C. Superior Court by the American Civil Liberties Union of the District of Columbia, Black Lives Matter D.C., and the Stop Police Terror Project D.C. (ACLU 2018). The ongoing story of the NEAR Act illustrates the difficulty of adapting entrenched public safety systems to be more transparent and responsive to the communities in which they operate. When the NEAR Act is fully implemented, D.C. residents and community organizers will have better information about public safety and law enforcement practices in their neighborhoods, further equipping them to mobilize on behalf of their communities.

## **ELEMENT FIVE: COMMUNITIES HAVE SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINING AND ADAPTING STRATEGIES**

Communities across the United States have been defining their own public safety priorities and working to advance them for decades, and stakeholders in every sector have a critical role to play in supporting these efforts. Paving the ground for community initiatives, supporting complex, multi-stakeholder processes, undertaking implementation, and sustaining change are all resource- and time-intensive activities. By following the community's lead and lending support when asked, external and institutional stakeholders—including governments, funders, researchers, and national advocacy organizations—can be instrumental to fueling community-driven change. While there are innumerable ways to support community-driven public safety efforts, many discussions in the field have centered on the following three needs: 1) Providing and channeling resources, including investment in grassroots leadership; 2) Lending support with developing strategic messaging; and 3) Offering research and evaluation assistance.

### **Resources and Investment in Grassroots Leadership**

Communities need resources to support their change efforts and invest in their grassroots leadership. Many of the communities with pressing public safety concerns have experienced systemic, historical divestment, including housing discrimination, underfunded public education, insufficient transportation systems and other infrastructure challenges, limited access to the social safety net and other public services, and a constrained local economy. Some community-driven public safety projects are entirely volunteer-run or collectively funded by members of the community pooling their assets. Even in these cases, community engagement and mobilization require resources, and lack of access to sustained and reliable investment in local solutions can stymie and even starve change initiatives. For communities of color, and particularly Black communities, investment in community-driven public safety initiatives can be part of a broader reparations strategy to begin to undo a long historical legacy of divestment and structural oppression.

Funding sources for community-driven work vary, ranging from small community foundations, to public/private partnerships, to government grants and other public revenue streams (Harvell et al., 2019). In the private philanthropy world, foundations such as the North Star Fund have been supporting this work for decades alongside community funds and other smaller-scale funders that support local grassroots leadership. Collaboratives such as Funders for Justice are making significant, more recent contributions to develop and align funding strategies. Public/private partnerships such

as Social Impact Bonds, or Pay for Success,<sup>9</sup> constitute another path to community investment, and the Massachusetts Juvenile Justice Pay for Success Initiative is well-known as a pioneering strategy to fund a local youth program and employment service provider. Increasingly, stakeholders are finding ways to braid public funding in with resources from the private funders and philanthropies that have traditionally been the primary supporters of this kind of work. A 2018 Urban Institute report found that these public investments typically take one of three forms: upfront investment (a new stream of resources), reinvestment (channeling savings gleaned from reform efforts), and invest/divest (shifting resources away from traditional public safety institutions and towards other local community-identified needs) (Sakala et al., 2018). While such resource strategies require careful planning, a growing number of state and local jurisdictions around the country are developing creative funding models, and their local communities are reaping the rewards.

### Support with Developing Strategic Messaging

While communities have been engaging in their own safety strategies for decades, the concept of community-driven justice is much newer in the broader political discourse. The time is ripe to test and refine ways to message such efforts to broader audiences. Generally, the public is receptive to the idea of investing in community-based public safety solutions. Initial polling found that voters identified the lack of programs focused on crime prevention, reentry support, and employment as a top public safety issue, and more than three quarters of respondents supported shifting some resources from incarceration to community-based options (Gotoff et al., 2017). The same poll revealed much less openness, however, to shifting some law enforcement funding to community alternatives, an area that is ripe for further public opinion investigation. While the public generally supports investing in locally-driven solutions, different elements have the potential to resonate with different audiences. Some might find the community empowerment and reparations aspects compelling, while others may be moved by the devolution of decision making to the most local level, the more limited role of government actors in solving community problems, and the potential for increased efficiency in public safety spending. Gaining a better understanding of how to message and explain the concept of community-driven public safety could help recruit a broader base of support and cement this approach as a unique and valuable policy strategy for communities that seek creative public safety solutions.

### Research and Evaluation

Knowledge-gathering, research, and evaluation can provide critical information to inform community-driven public safety efforts and document successes and lessons learned. While many initiatives have not undergone formal evaluations to assess direct impact on specific public safety outcomes, several have been evaluated and found to produce positive results.<sup>10</sup> Formal documentation of the strategies, progress toward goals, and relevant outcomes of community-driven public safety initiatives can help potential supporters and partners gain confidence in these approaches. However, documentation or assessment must align with communities' self-identified goals and use measurement strategies that are tailored to the context and specifics of a given effort. For example, a given metric for recidivism in one community may not be appropriate for a different one that is demographically and geographically distinct, even within the same state. Finally, efforts to build the broader community public safety knowledge base need not be external to the communities in which the work happens; community leaders



around the country carry significant experiential wisdom about initiating and sustaining these projects that can be shared with others interested in taking on similar efforts. This sharing is critical, particularly in situations when more formal documentation or evaluation is not possible or feasible.

## CONCLUSION

Over the last decade, a growing chorus of voices has been calling for changes to the United States criminal legal system. Recognizing the social and fiscal cost of mass incarceration, over-policing, and the overuse of community supervision, public safety policy has been touted as one of the few areas where nearly everyone agrees that we can do better. Solutions are complex and contextual, though, and there is no one-size-fits-all fix for the system currently in place, much less for repairing the innumerable harms it has caused. But stakeholders seeking to build a better future can learn valuable lessons from the work of the innovators, activists, neighbors, and community leaders who have been developing and advancing their own solutions for decades. Their local-level approaches come from a radical reframing of what public safety is and where it comes from; an approach in which police, jails, and prisons are either last resorts or off the table altogether.

As the examples in this paper demonstrate, public safety is inextricably linked to community wellbeing in the broadest sense of the term. Strategies that take this expansive lens consider wide-ranging concerns, including access to healthcare, functional transportation, good jobs, stable and affordable housing, safe outdoor spaces, and adequately-resourced community groups and institutions that help forge connections, bring people together, and shape solutions. Community-driven approaches start with the opportunities and challenges present in each neighborhood and build out from there, engaging with traditional justice system institutions and players only if and when it is necessary to do so, and challenging them when they get in the way. Truly changing how we do justice in the United States will require listening to and supporting the communities that are already forging new paths, and learning from them to seed and nurture emerging efforts around the country.

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## NOTES

1. See The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge (<http://www.safetyandjusticechallenge.org/>) (Accessed April 5, 2019).
2. See No Cop Academy (<https://nocopacademy.com/about/>) (Accessed April 5, 2019).
3. See The Participatory Budgeting Project (<https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/>) (Accessed April 5, 2019).
4. The city's website states that "in 2012, the Vallejo City Council established the first city-wide Participatory Budgeting (PB) process in the United States, where ordinary residents directly decided how to spend a portion of the city budget. Through PB, Vallejo residents and stakeholders share ideas, develop project proposals, residents vote on projects, and the approved list of projects that receive the most votes are submitted to City Council for consideration." See City of Vallejo California ([http://www.ci.vallejo.ca.us/city\\_hall/departments\\_\\_divisions/city\\_manager/participatory\\_budgeting/vallejo\\_s\\_pb\\_program](http://www.ci.vallejo.ca.us/city_hall/departments__divisions/city_manager/participatory_budgeting/vallejo_s_pb_program)) (Accessed April 5, 2019).
5. See Mapping Police Violence (<https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/>) and Data for Black Lives (<http://d4bl.org/>) (Accessed April 5, 2019).

6. See, for example, Courtwatch NYC (<https://www.courtwatchnyc.org/about/>), King County Sexual Assault Resource Center (<https://www.kcsarc.org/courtwatch>) and Courtwatch of North Carolina (<http://courtwatchnc.org/>) (Accessed April 4, 2019).
7. See Brooklyn Community Bail Fund (<https://brooklynbailfund.org/>) (Accessed April 4, 2019).
8. See “Neighborhood Engagement Achieves results Amendment Act of 2016” (<http://lims.dccouncil.us/Download/34496/B21-0360-Amendment1.pdf/>) (Accessed April 5, 2019).
9. See the Urban Institute Pay For Success program (<https://pfs.urban.org/>) (Accessed April 5, 2019).
10. Examples include: South Bronx Community Connections for Youth, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, November 2013 ([https://cc-fy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/SBCC\\_Technical\\_Report.pdf](https://cc-fy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/SBCC_Technical_Report.pdf)), Evaluation of San José’s Mayor’s Gang Prevention Task Force, Resource Development Associates, February 2017 (<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/grants/250620.pdf>), and Evaluation of Oakland Unite: Year 1 Strategy Report, Mathematica Policy Research, November 2017 ([http://oaklandunite.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Oakland-Unite-Strategy-Evaluation\\_Final-11172017.pdf](http://oaklandunite.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Oakland-Unite-Strategy-Evaluation_Final-11172017.pdf)).

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