

State Recovery Now



State Recovery Now
a project of America Achieves

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

As formerly incarcerated individuals re-enter society, the ability to obtain and retain stable and well-paying employment is a crucial component of successful reintegration. The typical barriers to accessing good jobs can be particularly impenetrable for returning citizens. Strategies are needed to update rehabilitation practices to ensure that returning citizens are able to reintegrate into and contribute to their communities in meaningful ways.

WHY USE ARP FUNDS?

The high cost of incarceration on state budgets is squeezing their ability to innovate in public safety strategies. The ARP bill is an opportunity for state and local governments to collectively invest in ensuring higher employability among returning citizens, while also lowering crime and recidivism rates.

WHY DO THIS NOW?

Large portions of state safety budgets go toward housing and feeding inmates. State and local governments should use the inflow and provide a one-time transfer to support community-based public safety strategies that could become self-sustaining by reducing costs of other public safety programs.

Employing Residents in High-Demand Careers: Supporting Returning Citizens



What are we trying to accomplish? Redesign rehabilitation and reentry programs to reduce high rates of recidivism and improve wages and employment in good jobs.



Problem we're addressing: Each year, around 600,000 individuals are released from our jails and prisons. A majority of these individuals will be rearrested within 5 years of release. This is due in large part to the discrimination returning citizens face when trying to reintegrate into society, including having a harder time obtaining employment.



Why does this matter? The barriers to reentry and employment returning citizens face are deeply entrenched in our systems. High rates of recidivism have mounting costs — not only to returning citizens themselves, their families, and their communities, but also in terms of additional pressures on our economic and justice systems. Policies that can help returning citizens get good, well-paying jobs, and retain them, help these individuals get back on their feet and benefit communities and local economies. They are cost-effective measures that reduce the burden on the justice system by reducing recidivism.



What is the policy intervention? To overcome challenges associated with the reentry process of formerly incarcerated people, policymakers can design and implement policies modeled off of Colorado's Work and Gain Education and Employment Skills (WAGEES) program, which supports returning citizens through employment measures. In the WAGEES program, Colorado's legislature sets aside resources for grants to organizations that work in the community providing direct services to formerly incarcerated people navigating the reentry process, boosting their placement and retention rates in good jobs, and thereby reducing recidivism. Initiatives such as Colorado's WAGEES program can create a virtuous cycle of support and reduce recidivism rates, saving money that can then be invested back into the community.



Cost: Total costs for this policy model will vary by jurisdiction and program design. As Colorado’s program scaled in size, it demonstrated clear advantages in cost-effectiveness, reducing the cost per beneficiary by almost 50 percent between the first and third years. In 2016-17, the yearly average cost per beneficiary enrolled came up to around \$1,150.

ROI: We can assess the efficacy of Colorado’s WAGEES program by comparing the average yearly programming cost for the individuals who successfully avoided recidivating, as opposed to the average yearly cost of having someone in prison in Colorado. For the 2016-2017 year, it is estimated that the WAGEES program resulted in **savings between \$6.9 to 10 million.**



Why now? The high cost of incarceration on state budgets is squeezing their ability to innovate in public safety strategies. Large portions of their safety budgets go toward housing and feeding inmates. These individuals become a continued cost to the state, without much rehabilitation occurring unless the cycle is broken. Strategies are needed to update rehabilitation practices to ensure that returning citizens are able to reintegrate into and contribute to their communities and economies in meaningful ways.



What does success look like? In the short-term, given the voluntary nature of the program, states and cities should emphasize participation rates and job placement in high-demand fields as key metrics for tracking progress. In the long run, success should be measured by higher job retention rates and wage growth, and lower recidivism rates among program participants.



Why ARP and/or Infrastructure bill funds? The ARP bill and additional funding to state and local governments is an opportunity to collectively invest in ensuring higher employability among returning citizens, while also lowering crime and recidivism rates. State and local governments can use federal funds as an initial one-time transfer of new public dollars to support community-based public safety strategies, which could then become self-sustaining by reducing costs of other programs.



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TAKEAWAYS

Better solutions to old problems

Community-driven public safety initiatives can lead to safer communities by helping returning citizens increase their employability and wages, benefiting the rest of society with lower crime rates and saving taxpayers dollars by keeping returning citizens out of prison in the future.

Equity

Community organizations serve as co-providers of employment initiatives. These organizations reflect the specific communities they serve and are best suited to develop responses to reentry needs within the unique context of the communities in which they work.

ROI

While the return on investment on each community-driven public safety initiative will need to be addressed separately, the results from initiatives such as Colorado’s WAGEES program show a high return on investment and improved social outcomes.