SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH
A S S O C I A T E S

Evaluation of the Re-Integration of Ex-Offenders (RExO) Program: Interim Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Reintegration of Ex-Offenders (RExO) initiative was launched in 2005 as a joint initiative by the Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (ETA) and the Department of Justice. RExO was set up to strengthen urban communities heavily affected by the challenges associated with high numbers of prisoners seeking to re-enter their communities following the completion of their sentences. It does so by funding employment-focused programs that include mentoring and capitalize on the strengths of faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs). In June 2009, ETA contracted with Social Policy Research Associates (SPR), and its subcontractors MDRC and the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), to conduct a random assignment (RA) impact evaluation of the 24 RExO grantees that had been in operation for more than three years. The RA study largely took place during the fifth year of these grantees' operations. A critical component of this evaluation is an implementation study, which includes two rounds of site visits to each of the 24 RExO grantees and alternative providers in their communities. This report summarizes the key findings from this implementation study; including findings on the community context and general structure of the RExO grantees; their recruitment, intake and enrollment strategies; the RA process itself; the services RExO grantees and their partners provide; the specific partnerships in place to provide services; and the services available through alternative providers (to which comparison group members were referred) in the 24 communities.

Community Context and General Overview of Grantees

Ex-offenders within the 24 RExO communities are typically released from one of a handful of nearby institutions, consisting of a mixture of Federal, state, and, less commonly, county facilities. Ex-offenders in these communities confronted an array of barriers—such as substance abuse and low levels of education—that significantly impeded their ability to find work and otherwise reintegrate into their communities.

The recent economic downturn placed additional pressures on ex-offenders. Unemployment rates in grantee communities increased substantially, and even if rates started to lower in some communities during the latter months of the study, they were still nearly double what they were in these communities just a few years ago, when the RExO program began. This rise in unemployment stiffened the competition for those jobs, which respondents felt were previously available to ex-offenders more easily. At the same time, grantee staff indicated that the

associated budget shortfalls of state and local governments reduced the overall level of services in RExO communities.

Given their education levels and skill barriers, many employers were very hesitant to hire ex-offenders. When they did find employment, it tended to be in one of the following industries: construction, food service, hotel/hospitality, landscaping/lawn care, manufacturing, telemarketing, temporary employment, and warehousing. Businesses that hired ex-offenders often exhibited one or more of the following characteristics: their criminal background checks were cursory or nonexistent; their owners were able to relate to ex-offenders on a personal level due to their own or their family members' past offenses; they had hired ex-offenders previously; and they were relatively small or local to the community.

The 24 grantees were a diverse group of organizations with extensive experience in providing a variety of services to vulnerable populations. The RExO program was often only one of many programs offered by the lead agency, and because of this fact, it built upon the structures and supports that were already in place, such as the staffing and infrastructure needed to deliver services. The majority of grantees had fairly stable leadership and staffing to oversee the grant's full implementation, though there was some turnover in several sites.

Because many of the lead agencies have large organizational budgets, the RExO grant was typically only a small portion of their overall budgets. Even so, respondents unanimously noted that the grant was significant in many ways, especially in its emphasis on a vulnerable population with many obstacles to employment. Grantees as a whole allocated the vast majority of their funding to personnel costs. Toward the end of RA, grantees were beginning to think about program sustainability, and many had identified funding opportunities that they hoped would sustain program staff members and/or key program services.

Recruitment, Intake and Enrollment

Prior to implementing RA, most RExO programs had an abundance of clients eager to apply for services. However, the implementation of the RA study late in the fourth year of the grant reduced the pool of willing participants somewhat because many ex-offenders were uncertain about the prospect of being assigned to the control group and receiving no services after making an effort to satisfy enrollment requirements. Consequently, many grantees discovered early in Year 5 that their enrollments were proceeding far more slowly than usual. In response, grantees significantly curtailed client pre-screening protocols that they had implemented for the previous four years of the grant and took other steps to make it easier for ex-offenders to enroll. In addition, all but a few projects significantly intensified their recruitment efforts.

The most notable outreach targets and referral sources in Year 5 were probation/parole offices and halfway houses, which had not been prominent partners in previous years. RExO grantees

also increased the frequency with which they attended meetings and made presentations to prospective partners and participants. Despite this, staff members reported that the most prevalent source of referrals remained the word-of-mouth recommendations of former and current participants.

Grantees varied in how they implemented RA, particularly in terms of timing and format. In some cases, RA occurred several days after orientation, so that staff members could obtain appropriate eligibility information and consent forms. Grantees also adjusted their intake and enrollment procedures in order to implement the RA process. Some grantees moved RA forward in their intake and enrollment process, using fewer steps to screen candidates for suitability and willingness to participate. A few grantees experienced difficulties with these changes while others managed to work in adequate suitability screening, though it occurred in a more limited fashion than before.

Results from Random Assignment

Initially, each grantee was given a target of 200 participants to enroll into the RA study, which would have yielded a total of 4,800 participants nationwide. Falling just short of this mark, the 24 grantees randomly assigned a total of 4,660 individuals into either the program group or a control group. In particular, 2,804 individuals were assigned to the program group (60.2 percent) and therefore had access to the full array of services available through RExO, while the remaining 1,856 (39.8 percent) were assigned to the control group and were not allowed to enroll in RExO, though in most cases other services were available to to those in the control group.

Nearly all grantees implemented the RA process smoothly, though the exact point at which participants were assigned varied across the grantees. One grantee implemented RA prior to participants' release, while the remaining grantees assigned participants only after they had made contact with the grantee post-release. There were two general models of post-release RA, one in which the assignment was made in conjunction with an orientation to the program at an initial meeting with the participant, and the other only after some screening and assessments were conducted to ensure the participant was a good fit for the program and sufficiently motivated to participate in it. At least five of the grantees that initially adopted this latter model subsequently dropped much of their screening process and gravitated toward the former model after seeing poor early enrollment rates.

While enrollment began slowly, it accelerated approximately in June and continued at the increased pace through December, when nearly all grantees discontinued intake. Ultimately, fifteen of the grantees reached their target of 200 participants (and an additional three reached at least 190).

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Most participants were male (81 percent), between 25 and 44 years old (63 percent), and African-American (51 percent). Nearly 18 percent were Hispanic. The vast majority had either completed some high school (43 percent) or had a high school diploma or GED (42 percent). The vast majority were nonviolent offenders (93 percent), reflecting the requirement of the first four years of the program that violent offenders were ineligible.[1] About one-fourth of all participants were on probation (28 percent), and approximately one-half were on parole (51 percent). An analysis of the demographic characteristics of the two groups suggests that there are very few differences between them. This suggests that the RA process was implemented smoothly and operated as intended.

Services

Participants received an array of services, though the sequence of these services varied depending on how the programs structured their programs. Two-thirds of the programs (16) focused on stable employment as the immediate goal for ex-offenders, which meant that participants received work readiness training and job leads immediately after enrollment. The remaining third of the grantees focused on the provision of essential supportive services first, before participants were referred for jobs, which meant primarily that programs made sure that participants were stable in their housing situation and sober.[2]

Case managers played many roles in the provision of RExO services. They acted as supports to participants and coordinators of the various services that ex-offenders needed to receive if they were going to succeed. Other key findings related to case management services include the following:

- **Having a sufficient number of case managers was important to ensure that caseloads were low.** Across all grantees, approximately 90 case managers were in place to support RExO participants (an average of 3.75 per grantee). Having a steady pool of case managers allowed many programs to keep the caseloads manageable, though caseloads increased somewhat toward the end of RA.

- **Through the support of case managers, participants gained access to valuable information about how to prepare for jobs, locate housing, and receive substance abuse treatment and other essential services**. Connecting participants to a network of community providers gave RExO programs greater

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[1] The U.S. Department of Labor allowed grantees to define nonviolent status according to the classifications used by the individual states in which grantees were operating.

[2] Although the primary impact analysis for the evaluation will use data pooled across all grantees, the effect on impacts of key variations in grantee characteristics, such as this, will also be examined.

access to resources, thereby increasing their chances of addressing the many barriers to employment that are common among ex-offenders.

- **The use of incentives, such as bus tokens and cash payments, motivated participants to stay connected to the program, according to grantee staff**.

In addition to case management support, RExO programs offered an array of employment services, including work readiness training, transitional employment, job placement assistance, and education and vocational training. Key findings related to employment services include the following:

- **Nearly all programs offered work readiness training, though the duration of this training varied widely, from only a few hours to more than 24 hours**. Work readiness training appeared to be well developed, focusing on the core soft skills that participants needed to prepare for employment, such as résumé development, interviewing skills, and independent job search. Additional training on life skills, such as anger management and financial literacy, complemented this training.

- **Some participants had access to transitional jobs or trial employment, but this service was not provided by most grantees.** Seven grantees offered transitional jobs or trial employment, with positions typically in the retail, food service, construction, and manufacturing industries.

- **Job clubs allowed participants to network and share job leads.** The six grantees that offered job clubs discovered that bringing participants together in a group to share job leads, challenges, and successes not only offered a good source of moral support, but also helped connect participants to employment opportunities.

- **Outreach to employers was limited, due to factors such as insufficient job development staffing and the lack of marketing skills among job developers.** Far fewer job developers were hired to help participants with job search assistance and job placement compared with the number of case managers available. Many job developers also lacked sufficient training and experience with employer outreach and marketing.

- **Grantees targeted the employers, which were the most likely to provide participants with employment opportunities**. Job developers made an effort to sell the RExO program to employers that have a history of hiring ex-offenders, and they sought to educate employers about the tax benefits and Federal bonds available if they hired ex-offenders.

Lastly, nearly all grantees offered mentoring services, both individual and group. The quality and intensity of mentoring services were mixed, and many programs struggled to recruit a sufficient number of community volunteers, and, as a result, relied primarily on group mentoring. While some participants indicated that they appreciated these groups and group events, they often strongly resembled other services available in the program, such as work readiness training or life skills training. Consistent across almost all grantees was the finding

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that ex-offenders were often more willing to participate in group mentoring than in individual mentoring.

Partnerships

Grantees sometimes lacked the capacity to provide the full slate of required RExO services and rarely had the capacity to provide all the programs and services necessary to meet the many needs of the ex-offender population. In order to fill these gaps, they reached out to other programs and services in the community to form partnerships. These partnerships also helped grantees increase the likelihood for future funding by increasing their effective capacity, strengthening their standing in the community, and further enriching their services by providing them with the means for better knowing their own clients.

The partnerships formed by the RExO grantees took many different forms. In the area of formal, sub-grantee relationships for the delivery of core services (e.g., case management, employment services, and mentoring), three different models existed. Twelve grantees used no sub-grantees at all. Six grantees had tightly coordinated sub-grantee relationships defined by co-located staff, frequent opportunities for information sharing, and other systems designed to increase transparency and communication. The remaining six had sub-grantees that operated somewhat independently, in some cases offering a full range of core RExO services and in others just single components.

Other partnerships were less formal and involved referrals for non-core RExO services such as housing, substance abuse treatment, and transportation, although some also included pieces of core RExO services such as work readiness courses or vocational training. These relationships with external organizations ranged from limited to quite strong, based on their histories and the level of effort grantees made to develop the relationships. Two other types of relationships existed among RExO grantees: internal "partnerships" with programs and services operated by the grantee or its contracted sub-grantees that were not part of the RExO program, and informal ties with criminal justice organizations.

Grantees had many challenges in building and maintaining partnerships. The challenges included a lack of funding to support partnerships, complex and sometimes competing restrictions placed on ex-offenders by other programs, selecting partners with different approaches, partnerships dependent on particular staff members staying with the organization, poor quality services provided by some partners, low take-up rates in partner programs, and resistance among certain grantees to building partnerships. Grantees overcame or mitigated these challenges through a variety of strategies that included: identifying promising partnership opportunities through local provider coalitions, staff member networks, and long-standing relationships; attracting partners by building up their reputations in their communities; entering

into partnerships with full knowledge of the potential partners; knowing when to end partnerships that were not working; and maintaining strong partnerships through good, frequent, and systematic communication and coordination.

Alternative Providers

In nearly all the RExO communities, there were multiple other agencies providing services to ex-offenders that could serve as an alternative to RExO. Several findings emerge about the various alternative services within grantee communities that were available to control group members and RExO participants alike.

- **Alternative provider services—other than those involving mentoring—were readily available.** The research team identified 97 providers across the 24 grantee communities that offered at least one core RExO service. Each grantee community had between two and eight such providers, and each of the three core RExO services was available through some combination of alternative providers in every grantee community, with many communities having more than one of each. However, only 20 grantees offered mentoring services, and only 15 grantee communities had a mentoring provider outside the RExO program.

- **Alternative provider services, with a few exceptions, were accessible**. Respondents noted that alternative provider services generally were visible to the ex-offender population, were located where ex-offenders could reach them relatively easily, used eligibility criteria that left them sufficiently open to those eligible for RExO, and had sufficient capacity to serve control group members.

- **Within most communities, the quality of alternative provider services was roughly similar to or slightly lower than the quality of similar services offered by the RExO program.** The assessment of service quality was based on measurements of the intensity of the services offered and on the views of respondents within grantee communities. The research team found that core services offered by alternative providers were slightly less intense than the same services offered by the grantee organizations within the same communities.[3]

In addition to these "alternative" providers, the implementation study also examined the services ex-offenders could receive either prior to release from prison or those they could receive post-release, under supervision by a probation or parole officer. Pre-release services were available to some degree in all grantee communities, and they often included a slate of services similar to what ex-offenders find in post-release programs (though they generally were substantially less

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[3] This could have important ramifications for the impact analysis. Control-group members will be asked as part of the follow-up survey whether they received alternative services. If a substantial portion did, this could limit the size of the impacts observed.

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intensive). Supervision by probation and parole officers tended to involve monitoring more than service delivery, especially in times of tighter budgets.

Impact Evaluation

The Impact Report for this evaluation will be submitted in late 2013. It will draw upon a survey conducted of all study participants approximately eighteen months after they entered the study and administrative data on criminal justice outcomes for study participants. Additionally, it will rely on data from the implementation study, which form the core of this report. As described in this report, the implementation study data reveal that RExO was implemented in widely varying ways across the 24 grantees and, given this variation, the impact analysis will not assess the impacts of a single program model, but rather the impacts associated with the funding stream known as RExO. Additionally, there were important differences in the level and variation of alternative services available, which control group members may have accessed. As a result, the service contrast across the sites may vary substantially and this could affect the impact analysis as much as the services provided under RExO itself. The data from the implementation study that are summarized in this report can be used to assess this contrast, as well as the variability among the RExO grantees, and thus will play a critical role in the forthcoming Impact Report.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Reintegration of Ex-Offenders (RExO) project began in 2005 as a joint initiative of the Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (ETA), the Department of Justice (DOJ), and several other agencies. At that time, it was known as the Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI), but was renamed RExO under the Obama administration. RExO was set up to strengthen urban communities heavily affected by the challenges associated with high numbers of prisoners seeking to re-enter their communities following the completion of their sentences. It does so by funding employment-focused programs that include mentoring and capitalize on the strengths of faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs). RExO built on several earlier and ongoing Federal reentry initiatives, mostly emanating from DOJ or ETA, including Weed and Seed, the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI), the Reentry Partnership Initiative, and, most directly, Ready4Work.

Three rounds, or generations, of RExO funding have been awarded.[4] Generation I RExO funding was awarded to 30 organizations across the country for a two-year period. Following this, 24 of these grantees were given subsequent funding to continue operating RExO for three additional years. In June 2009, ETA contracted with Social Policy Research Associates (SPR), and its subcontractors MDRC and the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) to conduct a random assignment (RA) impact evaluation of these 24 RExO grantees and their partners. A critical component of this evaluation is an implementation study, which includes two rounds of site visits to each of the 24 RExO grantees and alternative providers in their communities. This report summarizes the key findings from this implementation study and sets the stage for the impact estimations and Impact Report, which are to be completed in 2012. To furnish a context for the discussions in the subsequent chapters, this chapter provides three important pieces of background: an overview of the key issues surrounding reentry, a synopsis of the research on the effectiveness of employment programs in helping ex-offenders avoid returning to prison, and an overview of the evaluation. The latter section details the key research questions to be addressed by the evaluation, summarizes the random assignment process that establishes the two groups

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[4] A fourth generation of funds was awarded to ten grantees in June 2011.

from whose outcomes the impact estimates will be produced, describes the additional data collection that will be conducted as part of the evaluation, and outlines the implementation study that is the focus of this report.

Ex-Offender Re-entry into Society

More than two million people are incarcerated in Federal and state prisons and local jails, and well over 600,000 people are released from state prisons each year [Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), 2007]. Once released, ex-prisoners face daunting obstacles to successful reentry: difficulties with finding jobs, housing, and services for substance abuse or mental health problems; huge child support arrears; and challenges in reintegrating with their families. Moreover, they are concentrated in a relatively small number of urban neighborhoods that experience high rates of poverty and other social problems. Not surprisingly given these challenges, rates of recidivism are very high. The most recent national statistics show that two-thirds of ex-prisoners are rearrested and half are reincarcerated within three years of release (Langan and Levin, 2002), most commonly for violations of parole conditions, rather than for new crime convictions (Petersilia, 2003). Given these statistics, efforts aimed at reducing recidivism are critical.

Although the relationship between crime and work is complex, most experts believe that stable employment is critical to a successful transition from prison to the community. However, a large proportion of former prisoners are hard to employ due to low levels of education and work experience, health problems, stigmatization, and personal characteristics that are not viewed favorably by employers. While it is difficult to isolate the impact of incarceration on labor market outcomes, several studies have found that earnings—and possibly the chances of finding employment as well—are lower for individuals who have spent time in prison than for similar individuals who have not (Western, Kling, and Weiman, 2001). Finally, studies have shown that employers are quite reluctant to hire ex-offenders, particularly African Americans, those with violent offenses, and those who were recently released—and that employers are increasingly likely to conduct background checks before making hiring decisions (Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll, 2007; Pager, 2007). In sum, many people enter the criminal justice system hard to employ and leave it even harder to employ.

Of course, the fact that ex-prisoners tend to struggle in the labor market and frequently end up back in prison does not necessarily mean that improving their employment outcomes will reduce recidivism. In other words, the relationship between low employment and high recidivism is not

necessarily causal and, in fact, most offenders are employed at the time of arrest.[5] But there are both theoretical arguments and empirical evidence to support the notion that crime is linked to unemployment, low earnings, and job instability (Bernstein and Houston, 2000; Urban Institute Justice Policy Center, 2006; Sampson and Laub, 2005). Legitimate employment may reduce the economic incentive to commit crimes, and also may connect ex-prisoners to more positive social networks, role models, and daily routines. Moreover, many prisoners identify finding a job as one of the highest priorities upon release (Visher and Lattimore, 2008; Nelson, Deess, and Allen, 1999). In short, it is reasonable to hypothesize that interventions that can boost employment and earnings among ex-prisoners will also lead to reductions in recidivism. The RExO program was created as one response to this hypothesis. The RExO design is based on a three-stage reentry framework that begins with pre-release services, progresses through structured reentry, and then moves to community reintegration; its basic strategy is to provide work readiness and employment-based training and services to re-entering offenders age 18 and above.

The Need for Research on Recidivism and Employment Interventions

Unfortunately, there is little reliable evidence about which types of employment services, if any, are effective for former prisoners. Despite a long history of research in the criminal justice field, including some experimental evaluations, there have been very few rigorous studies of employment-focused reentry models. For example, a meta-analysis of the effects of "community employment programs on recidivism among persons who have previously been arrested, convicted, or incarcerated" found only eight such studies that used random assignment designs, and several of those studies did not specifically target ex-prisoners. The authors note that "this systematic review…is hampered by inadequate contemporary research" (Visher, Winterfield, and Coggeshall, 2005). The 2005 meta-analysis found no overall impact on recidivism from the programs that were included in the analysis. Several of the most important studies of employment-focused programs for ex-prisoners, including the National Supported Work Demonstration, the Living Insurance for Ex-Prisoners project, and the Transitional Aid Research Project were conducted in the 1970s. After these studies produced generally discouraging results, there was a long hiatus—only a small handful of rigorous evaluations in this field were conducted in the 1980s and 1990s.

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[5] According to BJS, between 57 percent and 76 percent of state prison inmates (depending on educational attainment) had wage income in the month prior to admission. Between 48 percent and 70 percent reported that they were working full-time.

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The flurry of interest in the reentry issue during the past five to ten years has triggered a new round of studies. The multi-site Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI) evaluation found modest improvements in outcomes for adult program recipients and no differences among youth participants (Lattimore and Visher, 2009). Other non-experimental studies have examined Texas's Project RIO, San Diego's Second Chance program, Ready4Work, and others. These studies have produced very useful findings. However, because most experts agree that personal motivation is a key factor in explaining why some ex-prisoners end up back in prison and others do not, there is some concern that ex-prisoners who volunteer for programs may be different from those who do not, and it is very difficult to measure or control for motivation in a non-experimental evaluation.

In 2004, a random assignment evaluation of the New York City-based Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO), one of the nation's largest and most highly regarded employment programs for ex-prisoners, was initiated as part of the Department of Health and Human Services' Hard-to-Employ project. Results showed that CEO produced a large but short-lived increase in employment (driven primarily by subsidized jobs) and statistically significant decreases in several measures of recidivism, particularly for sample members who came to the program shortly after their release from state prison. After two years, results showed an unexpected pattern: positive recidivism impacts continued after employment impacts faded (Redcross, et al., forthcoming). In 2006, the Joyce Foundation developed the Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration (TJRD), a four-site random assignment study of transitional jobs programs for recently released ex-prisoners. One-year results from TJRD showed a pattern of employment impacts that was similar to CEO, with a short-term increase in employment, driven by the transitional jobs, that faded by the end of the year. However, in contrast to the CEO evaluation, there were few impacts on recidivism.

Overview of the Evaluation

The RExO evaluation is primarily an impact evaluation, designed to measure the effects of program participation[6] on ex-offenders' employment, earnings, recidivism, and other outcomes using a random assignment (RA) design. RA establishes two equivalent groups—a program and control group—and compares their outcomes. In addition, the evaluation also includes an implementation study, a survey of all study participants, and administrative data collection on

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[6] Technically, the impact study will assess the effects of the *intent* to provide program services to participants, rather than program participation itself. For ease of presentation, the term "program participation" is used in this report. In the strictest sense, however, what is being measured is the impact of the intent to provide RExO services.

criminal justice outcomes.[7] Each of these components will be used to address the key research questions.

Research Questions

The RExO evaluation has seven primary objectives:

- Identify the impacts of the RExO grantees' programs on reentering offenders' labor market and recidivism outcomes.

- Examine the program's impacts by key subgroups (e.g., age, race and ethnicity, gender).

- Document and assess each grantee's experience in implementing RExO, including the provision of employment-centered services and mentoring.

- Document the partnerships and linkages that grantees develop with the workforce investment and criminal justice systems, faith-based and community-based organizations, and housing and substance abuse treatment providers, among others.

- Describe job training and placement services, transitional housing services, mentoring services, and other services received by control- and program-group members.

- Identify best practices and challenges in the design and implementation of RExO, including those involving linkages with the One-Stop Career Center system.

These objectives lead directly to two sets of research questions guiding the evaluation: those associated with the impact study and those associated with the implementation evaluation.

Questions Associated with the Impact Study

The primary objective of this evaluation is to document the impact of the services provided by RExO grantees on employment, earnings, recidivism, and other critical participant outcomes. Accordingly, key questions are the following:

- What impacts do RExO services and grantees have upon participants' outcomes?

  - What are the impacts on employment-related outcomes (including entered employment rate, retention, employment patterns and stability)?

  - What are the impacts on earnings?

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[7] These research activities are designed to take place over five years, although the evaluation is actually structured as a three-year evaluation, with two option years to be exercised at the discretion of ETA. In subsequent sections, any activities that are scheduled to occur during the two-year option period are noted as pending ETA's decision to fund those option years.

- What are the impacts on recidivism (including arrests, convictions, incarcerations, violations of parole, etc.)?

- What are the impacts on various other outcomes, such as receipt of services, work readiness, and housing stability?

- Do these impacts vary across grantees or by grantee characteristics?

  - How do impacts vary by grantee characteristics (e.g., partnership arrangements, range of services, length of participation, type of case management/supervision)?

  - How do they vary by contextual characteristics (e.g., community factors, individual factors, partner factors)?

- What are the variations in impacts by subgroups?

  - How do the impacts vary across different demographic groups (i.e., gender, race, ethnicity, age)?

  - How do the impacts vary across different categories of offense (i.e., first-time versus repeat offenders, level of crime severity)?

  - How do the impacts vary across other types of groups (i.e., those with different employment histories, with different levels of educational attainment)?

Questions Associated with the Implementation Evaluation

Although the impact study questions form the heart of the analysis for this evaluation, they can only identify whether there is an impact of RExO services and if there are differences in impacts between grantees or between different groups of offenders. To understand why these differences exist, it is necessary to understand how the grantees differ in the services and supervision they provide, and how contextual factors differ between the communities in which these participants are living. Key research questions for this portion of the evaluation addressed in this report include the following:

Context

- What contextual factors have been important in the development of RExO across sites?

- What are the typical characteristics of reentering prisoners (i.e., age, education, employment history)? Has the evaluation altered the nature of those served?

Outreach and Recruitment

- What efforts do RExO grantees make to recruit participants?

- Have grantees needed to recruit more participants than usual during the RA process? If so, how did that change the composition of the program group from what would normally have been expected?

- What referral system(s) are in place between RExO grantees and FBCOs, the workforce system, the criminal justice system, housing providers, and other agencies providing re-entry services?

Program Administration

- How have grantees organized themselves to administer the project?

- Who makes the decisions about the services that participants receive? A case manager? The participant? Someone else?

Services

- To what extent do prisoners begin receiving services prior to release from incarceration?

- What services do potential participants receive before random assignment? Has the point of enrollment been modified as a result of the evaluation?

- What are the key variations across grantees in the services provided to participants?

  - What services are *required* for participants in each site?

  - What other services are *available* in each site?

  - How long does a typical participant receive services before securing employment? Before exiting the program?

  - What entity provides the services?

- What employment-centered services (e.g., assessment, work readiness training, education/basic skills remediation, job training, job placement, post-placement follow-up) are available to program-group members? How are these services delivered?

- What mentoring services are provided to program-group members? How are these services provided? How are mentors recruited and trained?

- What other reentry services are provided (e.g., housing, substance abuse and mental health services, etc.)?

- What is the overall quality of services of each grantee?

- To what extent do RExO services differ from services provided to other offenders served by the grantee? How do grantees ensure that control group members do not receive other similar services from them that are similar to RExO?

- What follow-up services are provided to participants? For how long? What organization is responsible for providing these services?

- Are there any problems with crossovers (control group members receiving services they should not be receiving)?

- What services are available to control group members?

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Outcomes

- What performance outcomes for participants are emphasized by the grantee? Are specific targets for these outcomes set? What outcomes are of greatest interest to participants?

- What are the key barriers to participants achieving their employment objectives? To staying out of prison?

- What are the primary challenges in working with offenders? What strategies have been developed to deal with these challenges?

Design of the Evaluation

As described above, the evaluation used a RA design to establish program and control groups. Key components of the evaluation are a survey of all study participants, administrative data collection, and the implementation study. In the next sections, the RA design and each of these components are described in turn.

Random Assignment

Sixty percent of all eligible individuals were assigned to the program group and provided access to RExO services, while the remaining forty percent were assigned to a control group that is prohibited from receiving RExO services during the intake period and for a period of twelve months following that time.

All of the grantees had well-established intake and enrollment procedures that functioned as frameworks within which to insert the RA process. Each grantee was assigned a site liaison, who was a member of the evaluation team. The site liaisons worked with grantees to tailor the RA procedures to each grantee's existing operations, train grantee staff on these procedures, and monitor the implementation of RA. In addition, site liaisons worked directly with grantees to develop specific strategies for overcoming challenges related to the implementation of RA, including, most notably, low enrollment numbers, as described in Chapter IV.

The first participants were enrolled into the study in late January 2010, when one grantee implemented RA. The remaining grantees implemented RA between February 1 and April 1, 2010. Grantees continued enrolling individuals into the study for the remainder of the calendar year or, in two cases, until they had reached the target of 200 study participants.[8] A total of 4,660 individuals were enrolled into the study, including 2,804 program-group members and 1,856 control-group members. The Impact Report, to be submitted in 2013, will summarize the data obtained from these 4,660 individuals and examine the differences in outcomes between

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[8] Two grantees continued enrolling individuals into the study through January 2011.

those in the program group and those in the control group to assess the impacts of the RExO program.

Follow-Up Survey

The primary means of collecting information on employment and earnings information will be a survey of all study participants.   If ETA opts to fund the final two option years of the contract, a second survey will be conducted after 36 months. The survey is to be administered using Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing/Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CATI/CAPI) technology.[9]

The surveys will document the number of jobs individuals have held since their entry into the study, the duration of each job, the number of hours they worked, and their earnings per hour. This will enable the evaluation team to develop multiple indicators of employment, including whether participants were employed in a given month or quarter, their employment stability, and their earnings in a given period. In addition to questions concerning employment and earnings, the surveys will include questions on services the participants may have received, including employment and training services, mentoring activities, and support services such as housing or substance abuse assistance. The surveys will also include questions concerning recidivism and any subsequent criminal justice involvement participants may have had since their enrollment into the study. Although recidivism measures will be calculated using these data, the primary means by which recidivism will be examined is through the collection of administrative criminal justice data, described in the next section.

Collection of Criminal Justice Data

Criminal justice data will serve as the primary source of data on recidivism for study participants. Because there are many possible ways to define recidivism, data will be collected on a range of outcomes for each study participant:

- Arrests
- Convictions
- Incarceration

These data will be used to create a variety of recidivism measures, including whether an individual was arrested, convicted, or incarcerated following RA, as well as the number of such events that occurred, the time it took until the first event (arrest, conviction, incarceration), and

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9   The initial survey had been scheduled to be administered 12 months following entry into the study. Because of substantial delays in getting approval for the survey, this period has been changed to approximately eighteen months after individuals entered the study, though they will still be asked about the twelve-month period following their entry into the study.

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the duration of time spent incarcerated since RA. Data will also be collected for each study participant for the period before RA (i.e., a criminal history). Those data will be used to help describe the sample in terms of participants' criminal histories, to increase the precision of impact estimates by using these as covariates in the analysis, and to identify subgroups of participants with different criminal histories for analysis.

Data will be collected from state criminal justice agencies in three extracts. An initial extract was requested in the Spring of 2011, enabling the evaluation team to develop variables of prior criminal history, which can be used to compare the program and control groups and to specify in advance the key subgroups (based on criminal justice history) that will be explored in the Impact Report. A subsequent extract will be requested in early 2012. Should ETA opt to fund the final two years of the evaluation, a third data request will be made in early 2014 to cover the approximately three-year period following RA.

Implementation Study

In addition to the wealth of data to be collected from participants, it is also critical to collect data on RExO services and practices. Collection of data on the implementation and processes of the 24 RExO grantees will allow the evaluators to contextualize the impact data in three important ways. First, it allows the evaluators to identify and compare the services provided to program group members and the standard services that are available to ex-offenders in the control group. It also allows for identification of the variations in the services provided by the 24 grantees and their partners and documentation of the way participants are directed toward different services. Second, it enables the evaluators to identify variations in the overall *quality* of services that may be expected to affect overall impacts of the program. Third, it allows the evaluators to describe differences in the contextual factors between communities in which the sites are operating, including the differences in alternative services available to participants.

The evaluation team conducted two site visits during the intake period to each of the 24 grantees. The first of these visits occurred between April and June 2010, involved three days on site, and entailed learning about the grantees, their services, partners and alternative services in grantee communities. During the second round of visits, which occurred between September and December 2010, evaluation staff members spent two days on site. The first day focused on documenting any changes or modifications made to the program since the initial visit. The second day focused on a more involved documentation of alternative services available to offenders in each community, such as those from One-Stop Career Centers and from other community-based organizations (CBOs).

Data for the implementation study were obtained through four primary sources: (1) reviews of written program materials; (2) semi-structured interviews with staff members, administrators of grantee organizations, partner programs, representatives from alternatives to RExO within

grantee communities, and employers; (3) on-site observations of grantee and partner program operations; and (4) group discussions with program participants and case file reviews. Anticipating that each grantee would have a different set of partners and different collaborative arrangements, this multi-pronged approach permitted flexibility in adapting data collection activities to circumstances and helped minimize the burden on grantees. Because evaluation team members used previously developed discussion guides and checklists for each potential data collection activity, they obtained comparable information across all the sites, and across respondents within a given site.

Subsequent chapters of this report present the key findings from the implementation study. Chapter II presents an overview of the community and economic context in which the grantees operated. Chapter III provides an overview of the 24 grantees that participated in this evaluation, describing their structure, leadership, staffing, and partnerships. Chapter IV summarizes the recruitment, enrollment, and intake procedures used by the grantees, including how these aspects of the program were affected by the evaluation. Chapter V summarizes the RA process, provides details on the specific procedures put in place to generate the program and control groups, and details the characteristics of the individuals in the two groups. Chapter VI details the specific services grantees provided to those in the program group, including employment, mentoring, case management, and follow-up services. Chapter VII summarizes the partnerships grantees established to assist them in delivering services and working with ex-offenders. Chapter VIII examines the availability, accessibility and quality of alternative services available in the 24 grantee communities which may have been accessed by control-group members. Finally, Chapter IX summarizes the notable accomplishments of the grantees as well as the challenges they encountered while attempting to provide high-quality services and implement a rigorous RA evaluation.

These chapters provide a detailed description of the different program models and the range of services that were provided by the 24 grantees. This report thus lays an important foundation for subsequent reports to be produced for this evaluation. Those subsequent reports, which will summarize any impacts of the program, will use the analysis and findings contained in this Interim Report to provide the context for why there may be impacts from the program, and why there is variation in impacts across programs or types of participants.

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II.   REXO PROGRAM COMMUNITY CONTEXT

To provide a context for the discussion of enrollment, services, partnerships, and implementation
challenges and successes that occurs in the following chapters of the report, this chapter provides
background information on the communities in which RExO grantees operated. It starts by
taking a close look at characteristics of the ex-offender population in grantee communities,
including many of the barriers that members of this population face when trying to re-enter
society. It then discusses some implications of the recent economic downturn for re-entry,
including limited employment opportunities and scarcity of social services. Finally, the chapter
turns to the job opportunities that exist for ex-offenders, as reported by grantees, and some of the
characteristics of employers that do and do not tend to hire ex-offenders.

The Ex-Offender Population in Grantee Communities

When seeking to understand the context in which RExO programs operated, one factor to
consider is the composition of the ex-offender population that was released into grantee
communities. In each grantee community, approximately four to six incarceration facilities were
responsible for releasing most ex-offenders. In most cases, these facilities were primarily
Federal and state prisons, although in many communities one or two were county jails. Most of
these facilities served men, but usually one or two served women. A few communities stood out
as having a more unusual set of feeder facilities. Hartford, for instance, has no county jails since
Connecticut has no county system of government; all sentences, even those of less than 12
months, are served in state prison. Fresno, CA, known within the criminal justice community as
"prison valley," has more than six state prisons that feed ex-offenders into the area, in addition to
several county jails and Federal prisons.

The implementation evaluation gained only a general picture of the sentences served by ex-
offenders in each grantee community. Interview respondents in several communities discussed
their impressions of how many ex-offenders had served time most recently for a range of minor
to moderate offenses, such as those involving drugs and drug trafficking, theft, prostitution, and
failure to pay child support. Respondents did not provide as much information about the
numbers of ex-offenders who had served sentences for more serious crimes, such as those
involving firearms, gang activity, and burglary. This information is largely consistent with the

composition of the ex-offenders with which many of the interview respondents worked, given that RExO programs and many alternative providers tended to work with ex-offenders who served time for less serious offenses. Interview respondents in a few communities also noted how a considerable percentage of the ex-offender population was most recently incarcerated due to some sort of parole violation.

The size of the ex-offender population in each RExO community is largely a function of the community's overall size, although there are variations related to other factors. According to estimates offered by grantee, partner, and criminal justice staff members, the average number of individuals released from jails and prisons each year in grantee communities ranges from as few as 3,000 to as many as 20,000. In fact, the total size of the ex-offender population in these communities is much larger, because many ex-offenders, released over the course of many years, already reside in them.

Members of the ex-offender population in all grantee communities face significant barriers. Interview respondents, which included the staff members of criminal justice organizations and other service organizations not affiliated with the RExO programs, spoke about some of these barriers. Most frequently mentioned was substance abuse. Respondents in six communities estimated that half to two-thirds of the ex-offender population have substance abuse issues that were either directly or indirectly responsible for their incarceration, while respondents in at least 11 other communities simply noted how prevalent substance abuse issues are amongst ex-offenders. Another significant barrier is the low level of educational attainment of ex-offenders, which hurts their ability to find and retain employment. Respondents in at least 15 RExO communities discussed how few ex-offenders had obtained a high school diploma. Other barriers mentioned by respondents include the following:

- lack of an adequate support system—family, friends and community—to assist in the transition;
- difficulty finding work—a particular problem when not working can be a violation of parole;
- difficulty finding housing, often because of limited income or landlord biases against ex-offenders;
- lack of transportation, which affects job search and ability to get to service providers;
- a variety of mental health issues (and a lack of care providers);
- gang-related pressures;
- poor attitudes and low motivation to improve;
- the stigma of being low-income; and
- an inability to make child-support payments.

Many of these barriers are exactly what RExO programs and other service providers seek to address.

Impact of the Economic Downturn

Employment prospects for ex-offenders are poor even in good economic times. These individuals face biases and obstacles based on their criminal history and other challenges that are associated with living in the low-income, high-minority neighborhoods to which so many of them return after being released. Still, no evaluation of a workforce program within the last couple of years can ignore the tremendous additional impact of the recent economic downturn. As we discuss in the following sections, the recession affected employment prospects by reducing the availability of jobs and extending the length of time it takes to secure employment. The economic downturn also put a strain on RExO communities in other ways, particularly by reducing funding for services and for criminal justice supervision.

Unemployment in Grantee Communities

As is illustrated in Exhibit II-1, the national unemployment rate in the U.S. for 2010, when the bulk of RA occurred, was 9.6 percent. That rate is nearly double what it was a few years earlier, when the 24 RExO grantees first established their programs; as a result it was much harder for ex-offenders to find work in 2010 than it was a few years earlier.[10]

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[10] U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. http://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/laus_01252011.htm/

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Exhibit II-1:
Non-Seasonally Adjusted Rates of Unemployment in Grantee Communities for 2010

Note: Unemployment rates based on non-seasonally adjusted figures for the cities in which grantees were located. 2010 averages were calculated based on all 12 months of monthly rates. Data for December for all 24 grantee communities was still considered preliminary by BLS as of March 25, 2011.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2011, March 25). *Local Unemployment Statistics*. Retrieved from http://www.bls.gov/lau/.

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Also illustrated in Exhibit II-1 is the 2010 unemployment rate for the 24 communities in which the RExO grantees were located. These individual unemployment rates vary widely. The highest was in Pontiac, MI, but at nearly 30 percent—slightly less than double the rate in the next highest community, Hartford, CT—it appeared to be something of an outlier. Still, the unemployment rate in most of the very worst-off communities is more than double what it is in the best-off communities. Overall, the unemployment rate in 14 communities was worse than the national average for 2010, but of the remaining 10, only five had rates of unemployment that were more than one percentage point below the national average. Interview respondents in grantee communities were also quick to point out that unemployment rates tend to be even higher within the low-income, high-minority neighborhoods to which ex-offenders often return when released from jail or prison.

Over the course of two rounds of site visits to each grantee community, respondents in some communities suggested that the economic situation was improving. That trend fits official unemployment data, which showed a slight decline in the rate of unemployment for some, but not all, of these communities over the course of 2010.[11] However, the unemployment rate grew worse for some communities in 2010, and the overall economic situation for those in which it got better was still poor. Staff members of RExO programs, criminal justice agencies, and other programs all noted how "loose" the job market was: employers were less likely to attend job fairs, few employers were hiring ex-offenders, and it was more difficult than usual to find work for ex-offenders. It seems that RExO as well as other ex-offender re-entry programs were clearly struggling with just how to adapt their services to address the effects of such a significant increase in unemployment. At the same time, the economy was so bad that ex-offenders may have benefited even more from the services RExO and any alternative programs provided.

Limited Job Prospects for Ex-Offenders

The economic downturn hurt ex-offender job prospects in a number of ways. Interview respondents in two-thirds of grantee communities commented on how the recession increased competition for the jobs that ex-offenders typically sought. A probation officer in Baton Rouge, LA, mentioned, for instance, how employers that once considered ex-offenders no longer did so. A respondent in Chicago, IL, noted that the current state of unemployment was such that many overqualified people without criminal records were competing for the same jobs as the ex-offender population. The result, as described by a respondent in Des Moines, IA, was that employers were able to be more selective about whom they hired. As one person in San Diego, CA, put it, the only way an ex-offender got noticed was "to be a real go-getter."

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[11] Ibid.

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Interview respondents in many cities also noted that employers known for being ex-offender friendly were simply no longer hiring at all. In some cases, employers drastically reduced the numbers of jobs available. One respondent in Philadelphia, for instance, discussed how the city had drastically cut back on the number of laborer positions it hired for the parks and sanitation department, while another respondent in Sacramento discussed reduced hiring in the hospitality industry. In other cases, respondents mentioned employers that simply stopped hiring altogether. A couple of these employers had been operating large construction projects, which had either been put on hold or cancelled. Finally, respondents in a couple of communities noted that some employers who used to hire ex-offenders simply closed their doors permanently due to economic struggles.

Because of the reduced availability of jobs, ex-offenders were taking longer to find work and earning less once they did. RExO staff members at MAAP, Inc. in Sacramento, CA, observed that the average time it took a customer to find a job increased from one month to five to six months. Similarly, staff members at Urban League of Greater Dallas and North Central Texas commented that finding participants jobs was now taking about three times as long. Also, RExO program participants and staff in five communities specifically noted that, once placed in jobs, participants were earning less. One staff member at SE Works in Portland, OR, for instance, explained how participants were settling for "survival" jobs that merely made ends meet rather than securing more desirable "transition" or "engagement" jobs, which met participants' career goals or provided them with bridges to those that did.

In such an environment where jobs are scarce, ex-offenders appear to have two options, neither of which is necessarily compelling. One option, as interview respondents from both Denver and Chicago reported, is for ex-offenders to seek out even less desirable jobs than they may have sought out prior to the economic downturn. What makes these jobs undesirable is that they pay extremely low wages, are seasonal, or involve types of work ex-offenders have no interest in pursuing for the long term.[12] The other option is for ex-offenders to pursue additional training and/or education. While additional education would clearly be beneficial to this population, which exhibits such low educational achievement, convincing ex-offenders to pursue additional training or education can be particularly challenging when that training or education is needed simply to obtain basic employment and not to get ahead.

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[12] Interestingly, a respondent in one community commented that female ex-offenders might fare better in the economic downturn because they tended to be less selective than their male counterparts were in finding a job.

Non-Employment Effects of the Economic Downturn

Interview respondents also mentioned several non-employment-related effects of the economic downturn. Not all of these effects were negative—one respondent in Phoenix noted that rents lowered, which made ex-offenders' lives a little easier even if they could not find work—but the vast majority of the effects compounded the challenges presented by reduced employment opportunities and further limited ex-offenders' successful re-entry into their communities. The most frequently mentioned effect of the economic downturn was funding cuts to social services, including adult public assistance programs and social service providers.

Funding cuts to criminal justice services—also mentioned by many respondents—were likely to land particularly hard on the ex-offender community. As interview respondents in Boston and Pontiac pointed out, when governments make cuts to prison facilities, these facilities may release individuals earlier than they would have previously, especially when many prisons are already experiencing severe overcrowding issues. This increase in the number of ex-offenders in the community, in turn, increases the demand on probation and parole departments, which, as respondents in several communities explained, were themselves facing cuts in funding.

Funding cuts may also translate into less supervision of ex-offenders by probation and/or parole officers. In some communities, such as those in California (Fresno, Sacramento, and San Diego) and Seattle, such cuts translated into policy changes that increased the number of individuals released with little or no supervision whatsoever. To some extent, these policy changes may reflect an appropriate adjustment to current inmate populations, which often have been slanted towards minor drug offenses for which intensive supervision may not be necessary. At the same time, respondents in some communities indicated that many changes over the past few years might have been driven more by a desire to save money than the desire to make good policy.

The end result has been that the burden has been shifted onto already-strapped service providers, with many ex-offenders simply passing into communities unnoticed and unsupported. Although completely unsupervised ex-offenders were probably less likely to enroll in the study in the first place, for those who did enroll in the study reduced supervision was likely to mean that control group members in the evaluation were less likely to be referred to other service providers once they did not make it into the RExO program. Similarly, RExO participants under low or no supervision may have been less likely to succeed in RExO given that they had one fewer support to fall back upon.

Other Economic Factors

A few RExO communities faced additional complicating factors that only compounded the economic difficulties facing ex-offenders. One interview respondent in Baltimore, MD, for instance, discussed that city's issues of massive blight: there are more than 30,000 vacant homes

(of which the city owns about 10,000) and 16,000 unoccupied buildings throughout the city. Vacancy rates have also likely increased in the current economic downturn. These buildings are often concentrated in the neighborhoods where ex-offenders go to live and often are havens for drug activity and other crime, making it difficult for an ex-offender to steer clear of trouble.

In Louisiana, even five years after Hurricane Katrina, Baton Rouge and New Orleans are still recovering from the impact of the hurricane's devastation. As if that and the economic downturn were not enough, April 2010 brought the BP oil spill, further depressing that area's tourism industry and temporarily halting the area's petroleum and fishing industries. Respondents in those communities noted that tourism, petroleum, and fishing are among the industries most likely to provide opportunities for ex-offenders.

Finally, some communities were enmeshed in economies heavily dependent on a single industry and the economic downturn hit them particularly hard, leading to extremely high rates of unemployment. This was true of both Fresno and Pontiac. Fresno's economy relied heavily on construction, which ground to a halt during the economic downturn. Pontiac's economy depended heavily on the automobile industry, which has been declining for years but took further hits in this economic downturn. The particular challenge in these areas, and in others like them, appeared to be that many low-skilled jobs lost during the recession were being replaced by jobs that require a higher degree of skill.[13] Since ex-offenders have lower skill levels than those of the population at large, they have likely been particularly affected by this shift.

Opportunities for Ex-Offenders

Interview data indicate that ex-offenders tended to find employment in certain industries and not others. Exhibit II-2 illustrates the industries found to be "friendly" towards ex-offenders, according to interview respondents. The size of the text indicates the relative frequency with which respondents mentioned a type of employer or industry. The most frequently mentioned employers were those in construction, food service, hotel/hospitality, landscaping/lawn care, manufacturing, telemarketing, temporary employment, and warehousing.

One, perhaps obvious, reason ex-offenders were able to find work in these frequently-mentioned industries is that the positions in these industries often require few specialized job skills and relatively low levels of education. As respondents in a few grantee communities pointed out, higher-skilled occupations, such as many in healthcare, banking, and other professions, require

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[13]   Fletcher, Michael, "Why Does Fresno Have Thousands of Job Openings – and High Unemployment." Washington Post, Wednesday, February 2, 2011. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/01/AR2011020106092.html

skills that most ex-offenders do not have. Another, perhaps obvious, reason why these frequently-mentioned industries hired ex-offenders is that relatively few other people are willing to pursue work in these industries because the jobs offered are low-paying, seasonal, and suffer from high turnover. In other words, these jobs are often the last to be sought out by more skilled and experienced job seekers. Interview respondents in grantee communities, however, offered up some further insight as to why certain types of employers tend to hire ex-offenders and why certain others tend to not.

Exhibit II-2:
Industries in RExO Grantee Communities that Commonly Hire Ex-Offenders

auto repair   casinos   clerical   construction

food service   general labor   green jobs   grocery store

hazardous materials   health care   hospitality/hotel

janitorial   landscaping/lawncare   laundry

manufacturing   petrochemical   retail   shipping yard

slaughterhouse   telemarketing   temp agencies

transportation   warehouse

waste/recycling   welding

Source: Site visit interviews. Unless otherwise noted, all remaining exhibits also are drawn from site visit interviews.

Characteristics of Employers that Hire Ex-Offenders

Respondents noted four employer characteristics that tend to indicate that a particular employer is more likely to hire ex-offenders. Frequently a business will exhibit more than one of these characteristics at the same time. Identifying a certain employer as having one or more of these features and passing this information on to ex-offenders is clearly one benefit that a reentry program such as RExO was able to provide to its participants.

1. **The employer is less serious about performing criminal background checks or does not care if employees are ex-offenders**. Respondents in both New Orleans and Pontiac mentioned how this behavior is sometimes typical of employers in the food service and hospitality industries. Staff at Community Partners in Action in Hartford, CT also commented that sometimes the type of offense can matter for employment prospects insofar as ex-offenders convicted of

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Federal crimes showed up less frequently when employers did background checks, and were thus more likely to get employed.

2. **The owner or manager of the business can relate to ex-offenders on a personal level**. As mentioned by respondents in Egg Harbor and San Diego, employers were likely to see ex-offenders as individuals who deserved a second chance if they themselves were ex-offenders or had family or friends who were. Plus, these employers recognized that many ex-offenders work hard to earn the recognition that they in fact deserve a second chance.

3. **The employer has hired ex-offenders in the past and knows that many can be very good workers**. Respondents in several grantee communities mentioned that such employers were particularly likely to hire ex-offenders. In many cases, these were employers in the industries mentioned above who had learned that many ex-offenders seek out their businesses. In other cases, these were employers who had taken advantage of tax incentives and other benefits of hiring ex-offenders. These employers had learned what types of ex-offenders work well in their industries as well as where to go to find them. Respondents commented that these employers would rather find ex-offender employees through a probation/parole officer or a program like RExO than hire them from a general pool of applicants, because the program could serve as a screening mechanism.

4. **The employer is a relatively small and/or locally owned business**. Respondents in several areas noted that smaller, local businesses were simply more flexible than larger and/or national ones when it came to hiring practices and thus able to act on the sentiments described above. Bigger employers, including many national chains and companies that do manufacturing under Defense Department contracts, typically have corporate policies or other formal practices that restrict hiring. The challenge, of course, is that small and local businesses hire fewer people and less frequently, so it takes significantly more time and energy to work with or seek out jobs from these businesses. As one staff person put it, "there are opportunities…but you've got to beat the bushes."

Characteristics of Employers that Do Not Hire Ex-Offenders

A little more difficult to pin down, since employers often are hesitant to highlight the issue, is why many employers do not hire ex-offenders. Before exploring this topic, it is necessary to point out that some employers, in fact, *do* hire ex-offenders but may be placed in the no-hire category by an employment program such as RExO because they do not make the fact that they hire ex-offenders easily known. Interview respondents in Boston, Dallas, and Egg Harbor explained that "there is no list" of employers willing to hire ex-offenders and noted how it is not necessarily in the interest of those companies that do hire ex-offenders to make this fact widely known. Such companies, especially those with a broader, national clientele, could lose business if their positive hiring practices with regard to ex-offenders were more widely known.

Some employers do not hire ex-offenders as a matter of explicit policy. Respondents from Phoenix, Portland, Tucson, and San Diego all discussed how healthcare providers, defense

contractors, and big national chains fit this description. Respondents in several communities noted how these policies are sometimes focused on specific types of offenses. For instance, shipping companies do not hire individuals with trafficking offenses and companies that require equipment operation steer clear of individuals whose criminal backgrounds indicate that they may have substance abuse issues. Some employers do not hire ex-offenders as their way of expressing participation in a community-wide "tough-on-crime" campaign or philosophy in which offering sympathy to ex-offenders, even those who genuinely want to turn their lives around, is seen as encouraging criminal behavior. Respondents in Dallas, Phoenix, and San Diego expressed the opinion that such an attitude was common in their communities.

Many employers who do not hire ex-offenders (or rarely do so) do not have an explicit policy that bans hiring such employees—some may even profess a willingness to hire ex-offenders— but simply failed to hire members of this population as a matter of actual practice. Their motivations were less clear. Respondents suggested a number of possible reasons for the pattern of non-hiring among these employers: hidden biases against ex-offenders, a perennial lack of good job matches, inability to give ex-offenders the scheduling flexibility they may need for their various supervision or other appointments, and previous bad experiences with some ex-offender hires. One interview respondent from San Diego discussed how frontline staff members at some employers were willing to hire ex-offenders but had their decisions blocked by supervisors. The best many employment programs felt they could hope for was to flag reluctant employers as they encountered them and try to steer ex-offenders clear.

Bias against ex-offenders was seen by interview respondents in many grantee communities as a major or underlying reason that many employers do not hire ex-offenders. Respondents explained that biases against hiring were often due to a lack of understanding about the issues that ex-offenders face. Respondents in Hartford and Philadelphia both noted how this type of bias increased any time a major news event brought crime to people's attention. A respondent in Boston also pointed out how such bias was exacerbated by the particularly clinical and harsh-sounding language used in the criminal background reports accessed by employers when hiring. Respondents in several other communities noted how this type of bias was exacerbated by policies such as the box on job applications that identifies ex-offenders as such.

Policies and practices may be changing, however. "Ban the box" laws, which seek to remove the box on job applications that identify individuals' as ex-offenders, have emerged in some states and temporary agencies, and organizations like some RExO grantees have reached out to help explain the issues to employers. One job developer in Baltimore spoke about how she felt it was her responsibility to help educate employers so that they might become more sympathetic and forgiving. Clearly, access to a person who can build these relationships and bridge these gaps can be a huge benefit to ex-offenders searching for work.

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Summary

Overall, ex-offenders within the 24 grantee communities appeared to face many of the same challenges and opportunities, whether they were in the program group or control group or not in the evaluation at all. Ex-offenders in grantee communities were typically released from one of a handful of nearby surrounding institutions, consisting of a mixture of Federal, state, and, less commonly, county facilities. Ex-offenders in these communities also confronted significant barriers—such as substance abuse and low levels of education, amongst many other factors— that impeded their ability to find work and otherwise reintegrate into their communities.

The economic downturn clearly placed additional pressures on ex-offenders. Unemployment rates in grantee communities were high throughout 2010, and even if rates started to lower in some communities, they were still nearly double what they were in these communities just a few years earlier, when the RExO program began. This overall lack of jobs created significantly more competition amongst ex-offenders—even for those jobs previously available to ex-offenders because they were less sought out by others. In addition, the associated budget shortfalls of state and local governments reduced the overall level of services in RExO communities.

Given their low education levels and skill barriers and the unwillingness of many employers to hire them, interview respondents from grantee communities noted that ex-offenders tended to find employment in one of the following industries: construction, food service, hotel/hospitality, landscaping/lawn care, manufacturing, telemarketing, temporary employment, and warehousing. Businesses that hired ex-offenders exhibited one or more of the following characteristics: their criminal background checks were cursory or nonexistent; their owners were able to relate to ex-offenders on a personal level due to their own past offenses or those of family members; they had hired ex-offenders previously; and/or they were relatively small or local to the community. Some employers that hired ex-offenders did not advertise this fact. Of the employers that tended not to hire ex-offenders, some did so as a matter of explicit policy, but most did not hire ex-offenders for a number of other reasons.

III. GRANTEE BACKGROUND

As mentioned in Chapter I, 24 RExO grantees received funding to continue operating programs after their initial two years. Exhibit III-1 shows the specific rounds of funding for Generation I grantees and their amounts.

Exhibit III-1:
Summary of Grants

Year	Amount per Grantee
Year 1 (April 2006-March 2007)	$660,000
Year 2 (April 2007-March 2008)	$660,000
Year 3 (April 2008-March 2009)	$550,000
Year 4 (April 2009-March 2010)	$550,000
Year 5 (April 2010-March 2011)	$500,000
Total	$2,920,000
Source: ETA SGAs	

As shown in Exhibit III-2, grantees served a total of 17,409 participants during the first four years of the grant. In Years 1 and 2, grantees exceeded their target enrollment of 4,800 per year, or 200 participants per grantee. In Year 3, grantees targeted fewer participants (167 participants per grantee) due to decreased funding. In Year 4, enrollment dropped, in part because grantees had already exceeded their enrollment during prior years and thus did not need large numbers of enrollees to meet their total recruitment targets. Additionally however, grantees knew that a RA study was to begin soon. Because the timing of this evaluation was unclear and grantees were uncertain how the evaluation would affect their programs, many of them slowed or even ceased their enrollments prior to RA. Hence, enrollment totals for Year 4 were much lower overall.

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Grantees targeted enrolling an additional 2,880 participants (4,800 total including control-group members) in Year 5.

Exhibit III-2:
Enrollment by Program Year (All Grantees)

Note: Year 1: April 1, 2006 - March 31, 2007; Year 2: April 1, 2007 - March 31, 2008; Year 3: April 1, 2008 - March 31, 2009; Year 4: April 1, 2009 - March 31, 2010
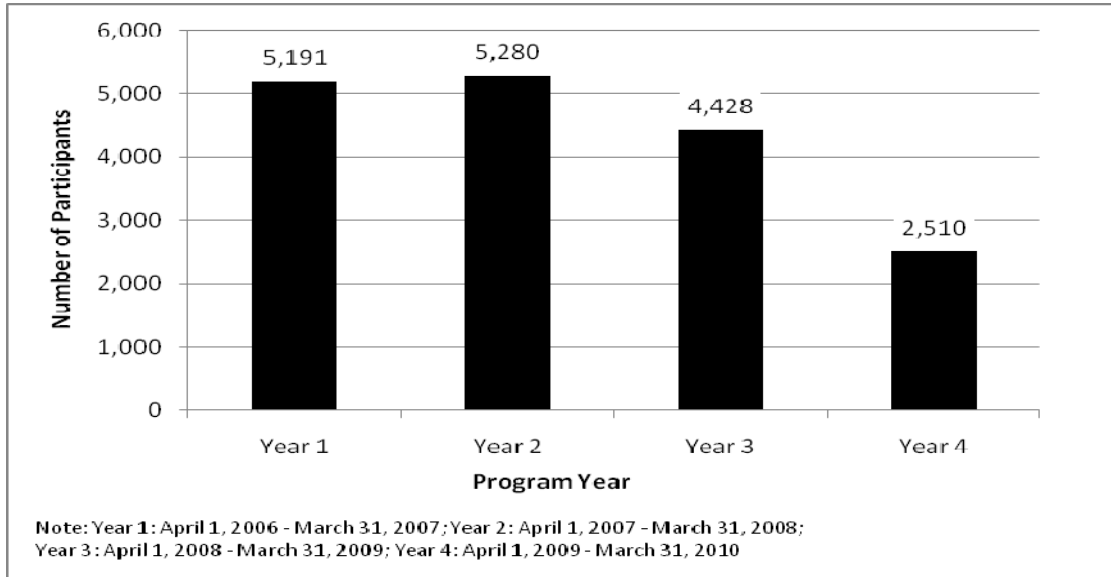
Source: DOL RExO MIS data

The 30 grantees from Generation I participated in a three-year process study evaluation, commissioned by ETA and conducted by Coffey Consulting, Inc. This evaluation focused on the first two years of program operation, including project implementation, outcomes, and costs.[14] It established a number of findings with potential relevance for the current study:

- Grantees targeted motivated participants who in their judgment could most benefit from the program; they gauged participants' interest and commitment through a thorough screening process.

- Grantees achieved some success in placing participants in unsubsidized employment. As of May 2008, about two-thirds of participants were placed in unsubsidized employment with an average hourly wage at placement of $9.29.

- Recidivism rates were low, as grantees reported that between 70 and 82 percent of participants had no involvement with the criminal justice system during the first year after release.

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[14]   The evaluation was conducted by Coffey Consulting, LLC and its subcontractors Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., David Altschuler of Johns Hopkins University, and Douglas Young of the University of Maryland.

- Certain types of participants—women, older participants, non-Blacks, those with more education, and those who served longer terms in prisons or jails—performed better than others.[15]

Grantee Characteristics

The 24 RExO grantees that are the subject of this evaluation vary greatly in their organizational structures, history in the community, available resources, and experience with serving ex-offenders. These differences must be taken into account when considering each grantee's services, partnerships, and outcomes. Exhibit III-3 summarizes several features of each grantee.

The RExO grants are operated by lead agencies that represent a diverse group of organizations. Of the 24 grantees, three are national non-profits, four are faith-based community organizations (FBCOs), four are community health organizations, and 13 are local/regional non-profits.

- **National non-profits**. The Urban League in Dallas, TX, Goodwill Industries in San Antonio, TX, and Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) in Fort Lauderdale, FL are independent organizations that are part of nationally recognized non-profits. These organizations have experience providing employment and training services and offer the full spectrum of services that participants need to prepare for work (work readiness, case management, job placement, and job search assistance).

- **Faith-based community organizations**. The four grantees in this category are non-profit groups that provide social services. They vary greatly in size and resources and identify themselves with various community initiatives and/or religious traditions or philosophies. These organizations' identities as FBCOs had implications only for the organizations' initial planning and mission, and not the day-to-day operations of RExO programs.

- **Community health organizations.** The four organizations in this category focus primarily on issues related to community health, such as substance abuse treatment and counseling and HIV/AIDS education, and most target special populations such as ex-offenders and ethnic minorities. RExO services represent sizable portions of some of these grantees' service packages.

- **Local or regional non-profits**. The majority of the lead agencies are classified as local or regional non-profits that also function as large multi-service agencies providing an array of social services to the community. Some of these organizations also have a strong trackrecord for serving special populations such as homeless individuals and ex-offenders and are well known in the local community for providing a variety of services, such as employment and training, substance abuse treatment, and housing support.

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[15] The Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative Evaluation Final Report. Coffey Consulting, LLC, and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. January 2009.

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Exhibit III-3:
Overview of Grantees

Grantee Name	Location	Type of Organization	Years in Operation	Number of Programs including RExO	Total Organization Budget (FY 2010)
Episcopal Community Services of Maryland	Baltimore, MD	L/R NP	83	3	$1.8M
Church United for Community Development	Baton Rouge, LA	FBCO	17	10	$1.5M
Span, Inc.	Boston, MA	CHO	34	4	$3.0M
Safer Foundation	Chicago, IL	L/R NP	38	12	$36.0M
Talbert House	Cincinnati, OH	L/R NP	45	30+	$50.0M
Urban League of Greater Dallas & North Central Texas	Dallas, TX	NNP	43	7	$6.9M
The Empowerment Program	Denver, CO	L/R NP	24	4	$3.1M
The Directors' Council	Des Moines, IA	L/R NP	16	4	$0.75M
Career Opportunity Development	Egg Harbor, NJ	L/R NP	40	12	$7.9M
Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) of Broward County	Fort Lauderdale, FL	NNP	9	6	$1.4 M
Fresno Career Development Institute	Fresno, CA	L/R NP	18	4	$2.2M
Community Partners in Action	Hartford, CT	L/R NP	135	12	$11.7M
Connections to Success	Kansas City, MO	FBCO	12	3	$1.5M
Odyssey House Louisiana	New Orleans, LA	CHO	37	3	$9.2 M
Connection Training Services	Philadelphia, PA	L/R NP	18	8	$1.8M*
Arizona Women's Education and Employment, Inc. (AWEE)	Phoenix, AZ	L/R NP	29	8	$2.8 M
Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency (OLSHA)	Pontiac, MI	L/R NP	46	90	$40.6M
SE Works	Portland, OR	L/R NP	13	26	$1.8M*
Mexican American Alcoholism Program (MAAP), Inc.	Sacramento, CA	CHO	35	5	$4-5 M
Goodwill Industries	San Antonio, TX	NNP	65	6	$45 M
Metro United Methodist Urban Ministries	San Diego, CA	FBCO	44	5	$2.0M
People of Color Against AIDS Network (POCAAN)	Seattle, WA	CHO	23	7	$1.2-1.3M
St. Patrick Center	St. Louis, MO	FBCO	28	28	$14M
Primavera Foundation	Tucson, AZ	L/R NP	26	5	$4.9M

Data for these grantees are from 2005.

Type of Organization Legend: L/R NP=Local/regional non-profit; NNP=National non-profit; FBCO=Faith-based and community organization; CHO=Community Health Organization.

To the extent that these organizations are large and resource-rich, they bring a number of assets to the RExO program. One of the more obvious benefits is that the RExO program is able to draw on a wide range of resources to enhance services for participants, for example by providing additional staff support and services. Having a large lead agency can also provide some insulation from funding uncertainties, as RExO programs can leverage internal resources to fill gaps in funding and services. For example, several grantees are able to leverage resources from other funders to provide housing support and/or substance abuse treatment for RExO participants.

Most of the grantees were well established as organizations prior to receiving the RExO grant. As noted in Exhibit III-3, the youngest grantee organization has been in operation for nine years, and most organizations have existed for well over 20 years. Exhibit III-4 aggregates grantees into groups based on the number of decades in operation.

Exhibit III-4:
Number of Years Operating Programs
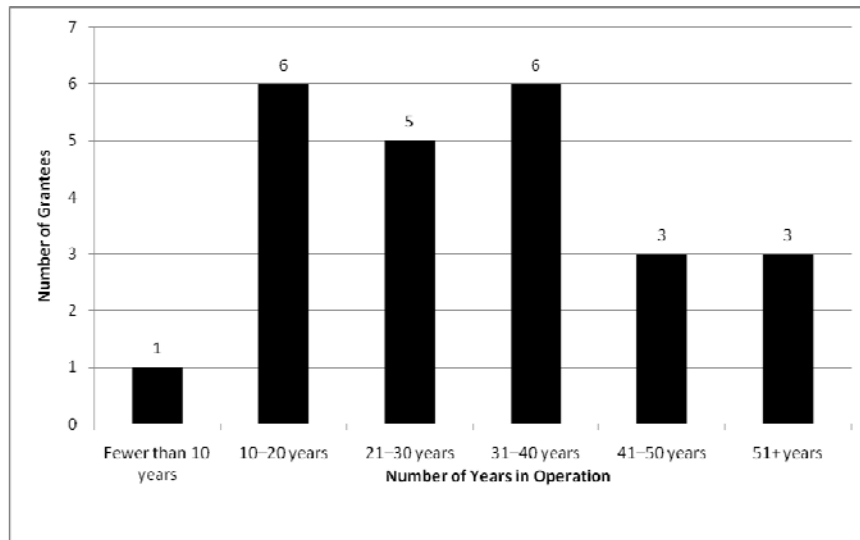
It is notable that six grantees have been in operation for more than 40 years. Community Partners in Action in Hartford, CT, established with the mission to serve individuals affected by the criminal justice system, has been in operation for 135 years.

The long duration of most grantees' presence in their communities appears to have affected several aspects of their programs, in particular, by enhancing their abilities to leverage partnerships and recruit. With 40 years of operation, for example, Career Opportunity

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Development, Inc., in Egg Harbor, NJ, was more easily able to network with the county jails to solicit referrals for the program.

The grantees' long histories in their communities also meant that they had established track records for reaching large numbers of eligible applicants. Without their well-established reputations and extensive networks, some of the grantees might have very well experienced even greater reductions in applicant numbers when they implemented RA (The dip in enrollment numbers during the RA study is discussed in Chapter IV.)

In addition to their longevity, the RExO grantees had many years of experience providing employment and training services to ex-offenders. Connection Training Services in Philadelphia, for example, had provided employment services for a decade through contracts with the Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation. In addition, the Fresno Career Development Institute provided workforce services for many years prior to receiving the RExO grant. One grantee, however, had never provided employment and training services prior to receiving the RExO grant and had to build the program from the ground up.

Program Administration

The grantees differed in how they administered the RExO program. These differences were apparent in the areas of program management structure, leadership, and staffing arrangements. In this section, we discuss each of these aspects of grant administration in detail.

Program Management Structure

Each grantee was the lead agency for purposes of RExO program administration. It oversaw all aspects of the program, including staffing and program planning, design, and implementation. In some cases, the lead agency also contracted with partners or community-based organizations to deliver some portions of the RExO program, such as work readiness training or mentoring. Exhibit III-5 illustrates a typical management structure for the RExO program.

Exhibit III-5:
Typical RExO Management Structure
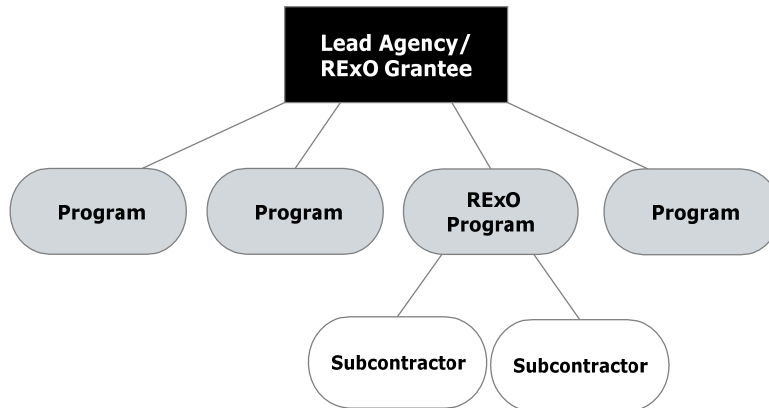
The model shows two major aspects of RExO program structure: (1) the lead agency typically operated a number of programs in addition to RExO, and (2) the lead agency typically contracted with community partners or providers to deliver some portion of RExO services.

Other Programs Available Through the Lead Agency

In addition to the RExO program, the lead agencies offered a wide range of other services. At the time of the second site visit (fall 2010), program staff members estimated that the lead agencies offered anywhere from three to more than 25 programs including the RExO program, although typically only a few of these alternative programs specifically targeted offenders. As shown in Exhibit III-6, almost half of the grantees had between three and five programs in-house. On the other end of the spectrum, six grantees operated more than 25 programs, and one of these operated about 90 programs. These programs varied in size and scope and provided context for the variety of services available in the lead agency.

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Exhibit III-6:
Number of Separate Programs Operated by the RExO Grantees
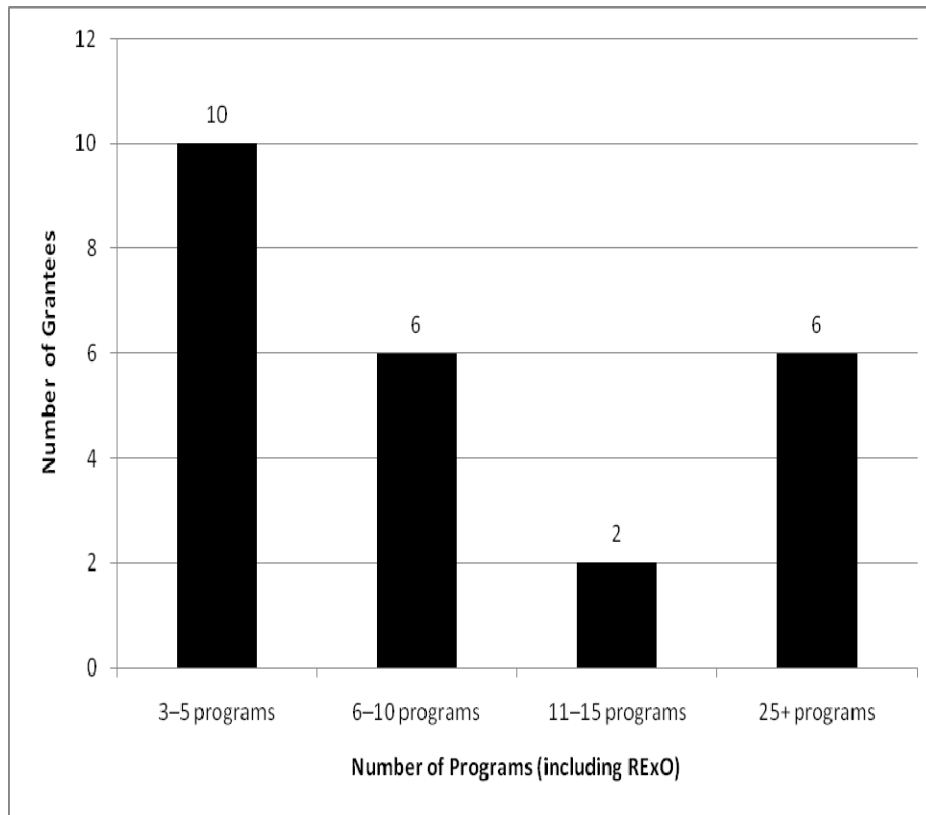
In general, the types of other programs available at the grantee agencies fell into the following categories:

- **Pre-release programs**. Services provided to individuals still in prison included counseling, job readiness training, case management, and referrals to community services.

- **Other reentry programs**. This category embraces a variety of services, including those that are similar to RExO services (such as employment services, subsidized work experience, case management, and supportive services) and others that were markedly different from those provided under RExO (such as family support and fatherhood programs in prison). About one-third of the grantees had other funding sources to provide these other reentry services, including funds from the Department of Justice and local funders. Although these other funding sources were available, the programs were fundamentally distinct from one another with different eligibility criteria, service delivery approaches, and programmatic structures.

- **Educational programs**. GED preparation and testing, and similar services were available in-house or through referrals for those seeking to complete or further their educational goals.

- **Health education and substance abuse treatment and prevention programs**. These services were prominent among several grantees. They included HIV prevention and education, pregnancy prevention for teenagers, and substance abuse treatment, prevention, and education.

- **Housing programs**. These programs, funded by local or private funders with the aim of supporting ex-offenders' successful transitions, were available at several grantee sites. Housing support included the provision of housing stipends to help pay for rent and transitional housing.

Because of these other programs, most RExO programs were launched in organizational contexts rich with synergistic opportunities. Specifically, reentry initiatives that pre-dated the RExO grant helped to inform grantee plans and provided lessons on which grantees could base their work. At times, concurrent reentry initiatives also provided services complementary to RExO services, adding value to both. Overall, where strong, pre-existing reentry programs existed, grantees did not have to "reinvent the wheel," but rather were able to leverage and expand upon promising work and fill in any gaps.

Community Partners in Action in Hartford offers a good example of the value of operating a variety of other programs focused on or helpful to ex-offenders. This grantee offered programs for those in prison and programs that began pre-release and continued post-release. RExO participants could access some of these services, including housing supports available through the lead agency. Similarly, RExO services were strengthened by the breadth of services and resources available through the lead agency at The Directors' Council in Des Moines, IA, which had an in-house temporary staffing agency and an apprenticeship program for RExO participants who qualified.

It may also be the case that some RExO participants were not eligible for some of the other services offered by grantees. The Michigan Prisoner Reentry Program at OLHSA, for instance, was only available to individuals released from state and Federal prison. As discussed in Chapter V, this program posed a special challenge to OLHSA's participation in the study. In another example, RExO participants were not eligible for housing services at Career Opportunity Development, Inc., in Egg Harbor, NJ, because these services were designed for mentally ill clients who are not ex-offenders. Similarly, housing services at the Empowerment Program in Denver were only available to women with multiple barriers to employment and in need of intensive case management, who made up only a small portion of RExO participants.

Subcontracts with Other Providers

Another aspect of the RExO program structure is that grantees subcontracted for selected services. Under this arrangement, grantees paid another provider to deliver core RExO services such as employment services, case management, and mentoring services, or a specific component of these services, such as workshops in readiness training, anger management, or

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transitional jobs with employers. By working with these providers, grantees were able to leverage these organizations' expertise in areas such as mentoring, workforce development, and other services to ex-offenders. Chapter VI discusses the range of services available through subcontractors in general. Chapter VII provides an in-depth discussion of the range of partnerships that grantees developed with these other providers.

Program Leadership

Leadership for the RExO program was usually multi-tiered, with the executive director of the lead agency and the RExO coordinator playing different roles. In general, the executive director of the lead agency did not have day-to-day oversight of the RExO program and its implementation, though some programs devoted a small percentage of the grant to this position for RExO administrative duties. The RExO coordinator was usually responsible for much of the day-to-day operations of the program and for managing staffing and community partnerships. Some of the coordinators worked collaboratively with the line staff, conducted employer outreach, and met with participants. In a few sites, however, the RExO coordinator devoted only a small percentage of time to RExO program operations and was responsible only for the administrative functions of the program.

Exhibit III-7 shows that the vast majority of the RExO coordinators had been with the program for most of the duration of the grant (three to five years). This stability allowed for consistent leadership and vision, both for the program and for the grant.

Exhibit III-7:
Tenure of RExO Coordinators

Note: Three grantees reported that the RExO coordinators had worked in the organization for more than five years. This suggests that the coordinators had similar roles prior to the RExO grant, since the grant has been in existence for only five years.
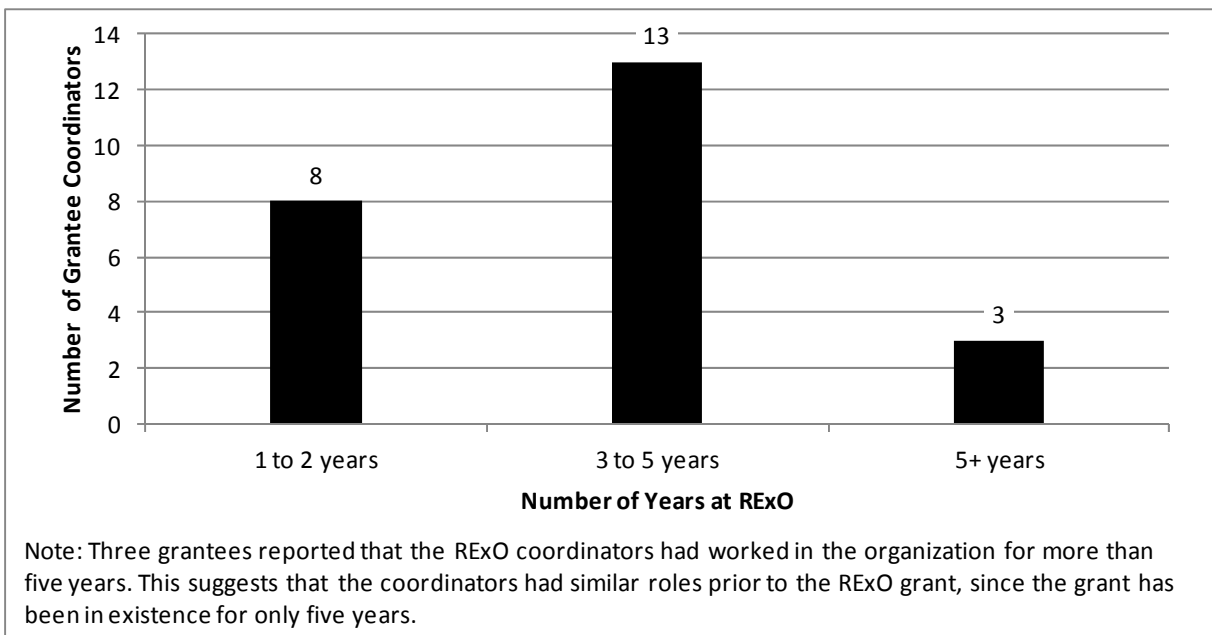
Approximately one-third of the grantees, however, had some turnover among the RExO coordinators. Much of this turnover occurred during the last two years of the grant, as staff members were seeking employment elsewhere in anticipation of the sunset of the grant. Other grantees suffered from a history of unstable leadership in general, resulting in turnover among the RExO leaders. In the most extreme manifestation of this problem, one grantee had three individuals lead the program over a three-year period. Detailed information about the tenure of RExO coordinators for each grantee is included in Appendix A.

Leadership turnover for the RExO program had both positive and negative repercussions. On one hand, new RExO coordinators often came in with fresh ideas and energy for managing the programs. At the same time, however, new coordinators required considerable ramp-up time to become acquainted with the participants, staff members, and existing partnerships. Turnover may also have caused a sense of instability for some staff members.

Regardless of their tenure with the grantee agency however, RExO coordinators typically had extensive experience working with ex-offenders and managing programs similar to RExO. Many also had pre-existing relationships with program partners or experience working in the local workforce development system and/or the criminal justice system. Often, RExO coordinators were able to leverage these aspects of their experience in managing the various program components. For example, the Program Coordinator at AWEE in Phoenix, AZ, worked for many years as a correctional officer for the Department of Corrections (DOC). This experience facilitated referrals and communication with DOC and furthered the program goals.

Program Staffing

Grantees differed in the number of staff members they assigned to work on the RExO program. As shown in Exhibit III-8, the grantees had hired an aggregate total of about 140 full-time equivalents (FTEs) at the time of the first site visit (summer 2010) and employed about 135 FTEs at the time of the second visit (fall 2010 to winter 2011). The jobs held by these program staff members can be divided into six major categories:

- **Administrative staff members** were responsible for the core administrative functions of the program, and included such individuals as the RExO coordinator, the executive director of the lead agency, and administrative assistants.

- **Case management staff members** were responsible for developing individual service plans, counseling participants, and brokering community services to address barriers to employment.

- **Employment services staff members** included job developers, retention specialists, and instructors for the work readiness workshops.

- **Mentoring staff members** included mentoring coordinators and individual mentors who were hired to mentor participants.

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- **Intake/outreach staff members** were responsible for conducting intake functions, such as the paperwork required for eligibility determination and for the RA process and outreach and recruitment.

- **"Other" staff members** were those who do not fit in the above categories; they included van drivers, computer instructors or other instructors, and substance abuse counselors.

A detailed breakdown of staffing by category is included in Appendix B. Exhibit III-8 shows the number of FTEs employed in each category across all the grantees and shows these figures as percentages of the total.

Exhibit III-8:
Allocation of Staffing Resources by Job Category Across Grantees (FTE)
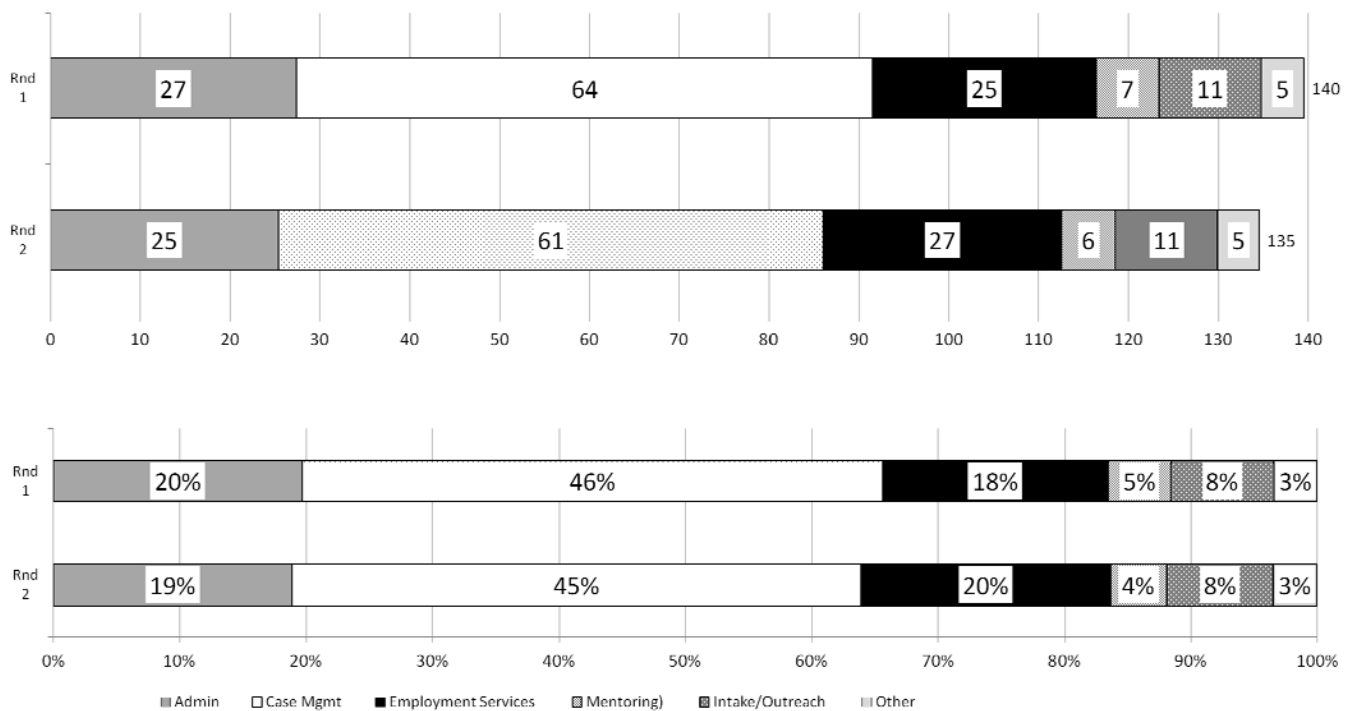
Note: : Two sites were omitted because their staffing data was unavailable or incomplete.
FTEs are divided evenly for staff members who performed multiple roles.

Based on the data shown in Exhibit III-8, it is possible to make several general observations about how the grantees allocated staffing resources:

- **The number of FTEs decreased between the two rounds of site visits**. As the RExO grant wound down, grantees reduced their staffing arrangements to reflect the anticipated reduced budgets.

- **Case manager was the most heavily staffed position**. Case managers were often described as the glue that holds the programs and participants together.

Naturally, programs invested heavily in these positions to provide the fundamental supports that ex-offenders needed to adjust to life in the community. At some sites, case managers had multiple roles, such as job development, recruitment, and intake.

- **Individuals with administrative functions made up sizable portions of RExO program staff**. Approximately 19 percent of FTEs were devoted to administrative functions.

- **The number of employment services staff members increased between the Round 1 and Round 2 site visits.** This included an increase in the number of job developers—from 25 to 27 FTEs—due to grantees' increased emphasis on job placement.

- **Intake and outreach accounted for a relatively small percentage of the staffing**. This is because few programs hired staff members to perform these functions exclusively. Instead, programs relied on other staff members, such as case managers or job developers, to support this function.

- **Mentoring services utilized the fewest staff members.** As will be discussed in Chapter VI, many grantees relied on subcontractors to deliver mentoring services because of their specialized expertise in this area. Very few grantees designated a separate mentoring coordinator since this role was usually performed by other staff members.

In addition to the staff members who were hired directly by the grantees, additional staff members were available through subcontractors to perform some of the functions listed above. At the St. Patrick Center in St. Louis, for example, case managers were subcontracted through a local provider. Other sites hired guest speakers or consultants to deliver portions of their work readiness workshops, such as those focused on life skills, financial literacy, and anger management.

Given the multiple and demanding responsibilities of nearly all RExO staff positions, programs hired individuals with diverse backgrounds and characteristics. Some grantees had staff members with long, rich histories in working with ex-offenders and other disadvantaged populations, while others had staff members with specialized experiences that were related to the work of the RExO program, such as former teachers or chemical dependency counselors. A number of sites had staff members who were ex-offenders themselves, including a number of that participated in earlier years of RExO. In general, staff members with criminal histories were seen as particularly successful in working with ex-offenders. One program director illustrated this point with the following quote:

> *Our programs are successful because we have people that have been in the streets, done drugs, been in prison, but they cleaned up. And they serve as good role models, and they can build trust…trust is a big thing with this population.*

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Although programs appeared to have the staffing they needed to perform many of the functions required for the RExO programs, many of them faced important challenges related to staffing.

- **RExO staff members "wore many hats."** Staffing arrangements among the RExO programs were usually fluid, with staff members playing many roles. The case managers at Career Opportunity Development Inc., in Egg Harbor, NJ, for example, were responsible for intake, job development, and follow-up. This sometimes led staff to feel stretched too thinly, and for some services to go unprovided.

- **There was considerable turnover among job developers**. Generally speaking, few programs faced serious or persistent staff turnover challenges. The exception was the job developer position, which required concrete benchmarks of success that many job developers were unable to fulfill due in part to the current economic climate. One grantee, for example, was unable to retain job developers, having hired four in four years.

- **Some grantees had difficulty finding job developers with the right mix of skills**. Respondents noted that while job developers usually had experience working with ex-offenders, they often lacked the right skill sets to be successful in their positions. The skills program staff identified that were most lacking among job developers were those related to marketing ex-offenders to employers and making strategic use of labor market information to identify opportunities for ex-offenders.

Funding and Budget

As noted above, each grantee received a total of $2,920,000 over five years. In Year 5 (April 2010–March 2011), each grantee received $500,000. (Grantees in Year 5 are the subject of this evaluation). This section discusses what proportion the RExO grant was of the larger lead agencies and budgets, and the ways in which programs budgeted their grant funds in Year 5.

The RExO Grant in the Context of Organizational Budgets

To understand the size of the RExO grant for the various grantees, we compare the grant amount in Year 5 to each grantee's total organizational budget in the same year. Because the sizes of the grantees' overall annual budgets varied significantly, from a low of $.75 million to a high of $50 million (see Exhibit III-1), a $500,000 grant had different meaning to different grantees. Exhibit III-9 shows the Year-5 grant amount as a percentage of grantees' overall budgets in FY 2009–2010, both individually and in the aggregate, to give a sense of its relative proportion of the overall budgets.

Exhibit III-9:
RExO Grant as Percent of Organizational Budget

Note: Organizational budgets were not available for two grantees, so only 22 grantees are included in this chart. Data for Year 5 (FY 2009-2010)

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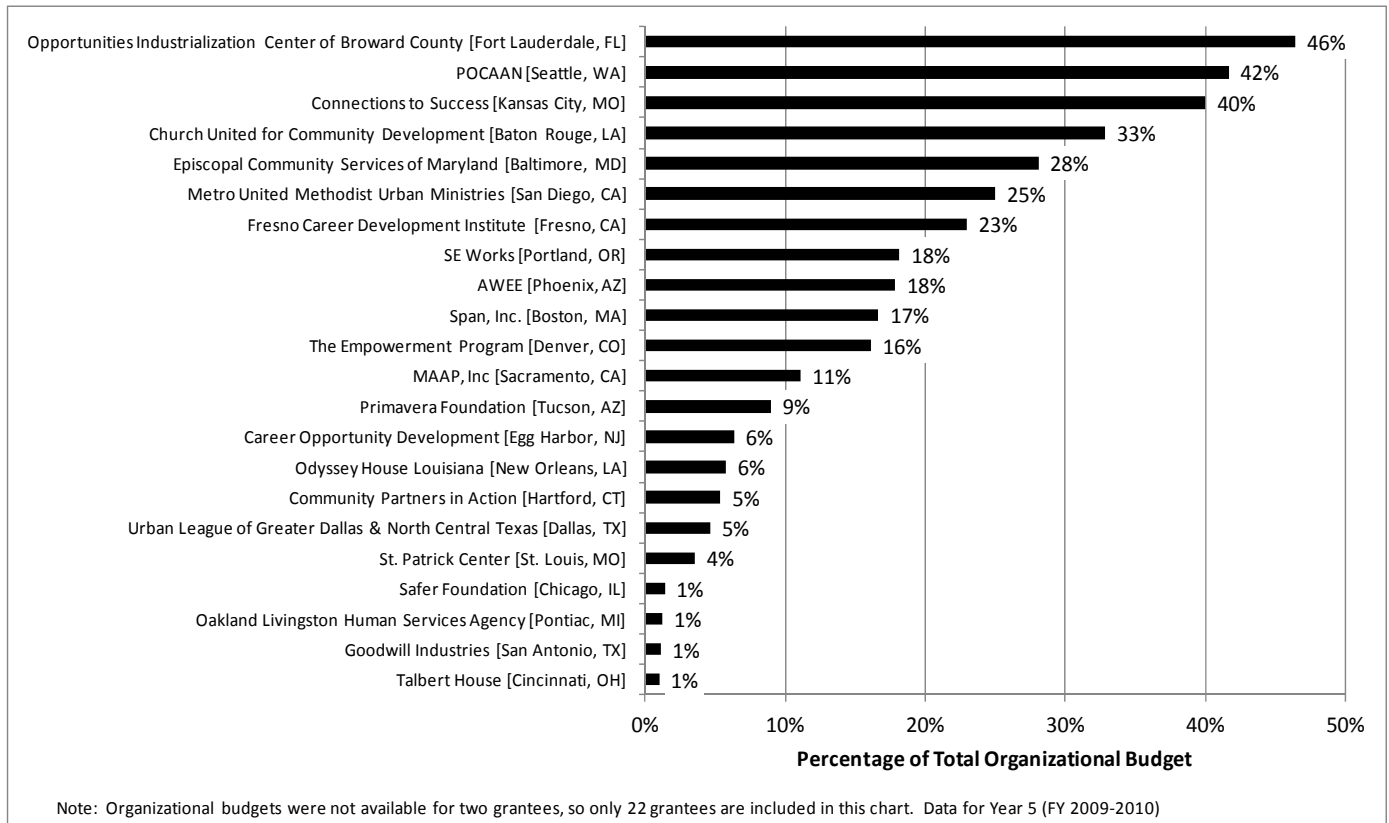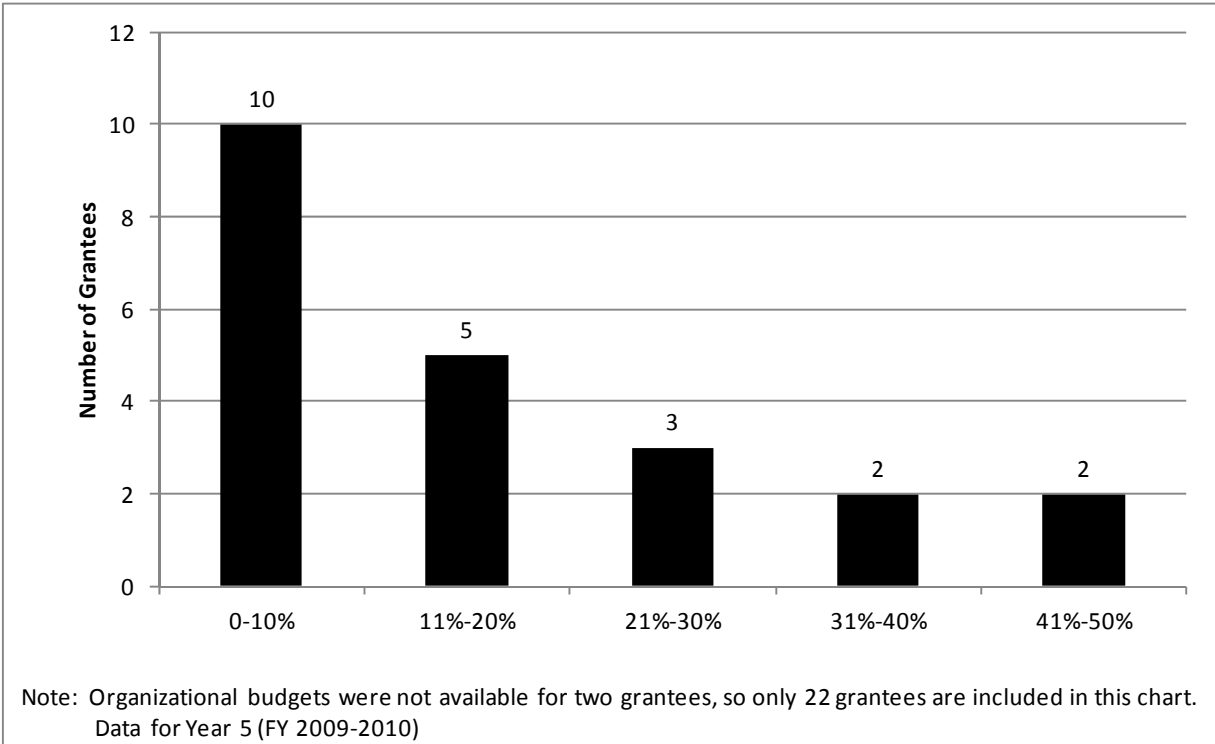
Examining Exhibit III-9, two basic generalizations emerge:

- **For about half the grantees, the RExO grant represented a small portion of the overall organizational budget**. This finding is not surprising, given that many grantees were large, well-established organizations with annual budgets as high as $50 million.

- **For a smaller number, the RExO grant made up a third or more of the organizational budget.** At these four organizations, the RExO program assumed enormous importance, in some cases influencing the way in which the grantee structured its services. Staff members at one of these grantees, for example, decided to incorporate work readiness training in all of the organization's programs, not just those for ex-offenders, based on its RExO experience.

The relatively small size of the RExO grant for the larger grantee organizations did not necessarily mean that the grant was less important to them than it was to smaller grantee organizations. For example, even though the RExO program budget was only about one percent of the budget of the Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency, respondents at this organization noted that the RExO grant contributed tremendous value to the organizational mission because of RExO's emphasis on a vulnerable population that the lead agency is committed to serving.

Budgeting of RExO Grant Funds

Exhibit III-10 provides an overview of how the grantees as a whole chose to distribute their grant funds in Year 5 by key categories. The figures in the exhibit represent *planned* budgeting only, not actual expenditures. Based on data collected during the site visits, it is clear that actual spending sometimes varied from the planned budget.

Exhibit III-10:
Planned Distribution of Grant Funds, Averaged Across Grantees (FY 2009–2010)

Note: Budget breakdowns were unavailable for 11 sites
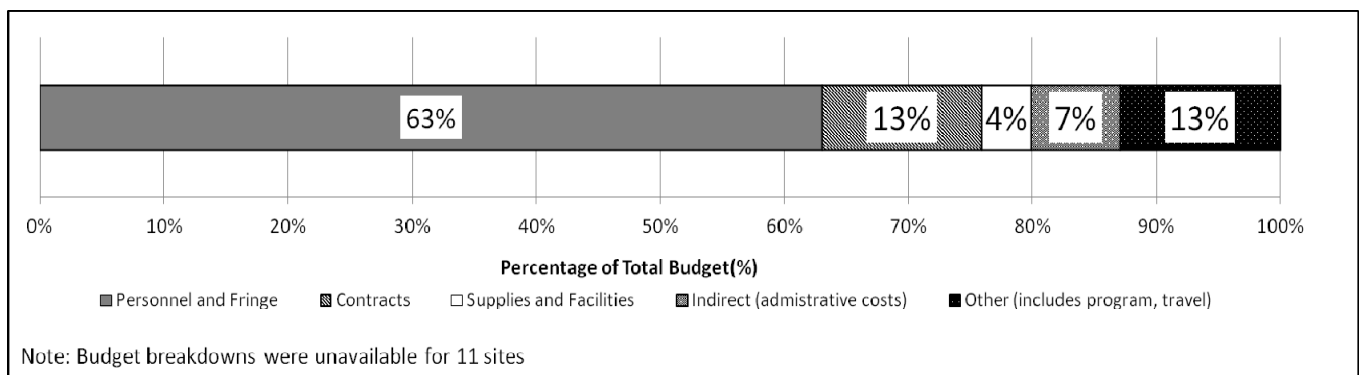
The following generalizations can be made about how the grantees planned to spend their grant funds in Year 5 of the grant.

- **The majority of grant funds (63 percent on average) were budgeted for personnel and fringe costs.** These expenses included the salaries for all program staff, such as case managers, employment service staff, and administrative staff. Sites differed in the specific amount of grant resources they devoted to personnel costs. The Talbert House in Cincinnati devoted the least amount of grant funds to personnel, since they subcontracted out for employment services and mentoring. At the other end of the spectrum, Church United for Community Development in Baton Rouge and Career Opportunity Development, Inc., in Egg Harbor, NJ, devoted the bulk of their budgets to personnel because they hired staff directly to deliver most of the RExO services.

- **Contracts made up the next largest category of spending (13 percent of budgets on average).** Some grantees chose to contract with CBOs for work readiness training, mentoring services, life skills training, and other workshops to augment their service mix.

- **Expenses in the "other" category (13 percent on average) included a wide range of services and costs.** Grantees categorized the following services under the "other" budget category: supportive services (transportation, employment-related clothing and supplies), incentives, stipends, and in some cases, trial employment/subsidized work experience and vocational training.

- **Smaller amounts were budgeted to be spent on administrative costs (seven percent) and facility rental (four percent).**

Overall, the level of funding that grantees dedicated to personnel and fringe costs was significant. Grantees hired staff to serve as case managers, counselors, job developers, and even mentors to connect participants to resources and provide wraparound supportive services. The commitment of the members of the RExO staff was a core asset of programs and something that participants consistently pointed to as a strength.

Summary

The 24 RExO grantees that took part in this evaluation represent a diverse group of organizations with extensive experience providing a variety of services to vulnerable populations. The RExO program was one of many programs available at the lead agency, and because of this fact, it built upon the structures and supports that were already in place, such as the staffing and infrastructure needed to deliver services. The majority of grantees had fairly stable leadership to oversee the grant's full implementation, though some turnover did occur in several sites. Other program staff members were also fairly stable throughout the life of the grant, and many had been with the programs since the beginning. As of the summer of 2010, grantees had a total of about 140 FTEs working in the RExO program, a number that decreased slightly (to 135 FTEs) in late 2010 as the grant was wound down.

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Because many of the lead agencies have large organizational budgets, the RExO grant represented a small portion of their overall budgets. Despite this fact, respondents unanimously noted that the grant was significant in many ways, especially in its emphasis on a vulnerable population with many obstacles to employment. Finally, grantees as a whole allocated a significant amount of grant funding to personnel costs to ensure that participants received intensive support from staff members who could connect them to critical services to help them succeed. During the second site visit, grantees were beginning to think about program sustainability, and many had already identified funding opportunities that they hoped would sustain program staff members and/or key program services.

IV. RECRUITMENT, INTAKE, ASSESSMENT, AND ENROLLMENT

The RExO grantees aimed to enroll at least 4,800 total participants (at least 200 per grantee) in the impact study and approximately 2,880 of these participants to the program group. This chapter describes the processes by which the grantees sought to recruit and enroll these participants. More specifically, the chapter details program practices associated with eligibility determination, recruitment, intake, assessment, and enrollment. The chapter ends with a discussion of the various enrollment-related successes that grantees enjoyed and the challenges that they faced.

Target Group and Eligibility

Through RExO, ETA sought to reduce recidivism in urban communities with significant numbers of returning ex-offenders by helping these individuals find and prepare for employment.[16] To realize this goal, the grant targeted adults at risk of re-arrest but with reasonable potential to enter the workforce. Accordingly, ETA stipulated that an ex-offender must have met a number of requirements in order to receive RExO services:

- The ex-offender must have been 18 years of age or older.
- The ex-offender must have been convicted as an adult and imprisoned pursuant to an Act of Congress or a state law.
- The ex-offender must have been incarcerated for a minimum of 120 days.
- The ex-offender must have enrolled in the program within 180 days of release from a prison, jail, or halfway institution (but sites were allowed to enroll up to 10 percent of participants whose time after release exceeded 180 days).
- The ex-offender must never have been convicted of a sex-related offense.
- The ex-offender's most recent offense must not have been violent.

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[16] Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (2005). "Workforce Investment Act—Demonstration Grants; Solicitation for Grant Applications—Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative." *Federal Register*. Vol, 70, No, 62.

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In announcing the Year 5 award, ETA allowed grantees to begin serving individuals who had been convicted of a violent offense in the past, provided that their most recent offense was not violent. The intent was to support programs in meeting their target enrollments by expanding the pool of eligible study participants. Still, it was up to the grantees to use their discretion to decide whether they would serve those previously convicted of violent offenses, and four programs opted not to serve such individuals. These four programs cited no single reason for continuing to exclude ex-offenders with a violent offense. Nevertheless, some combination of two factors may have contributed to their decisions: (1) program staff members did not feel comfortable serving individuals with histories of violent offenses (or they worried the employers they worked with may not feel comfortable); and (2) programs were on pace to meet their enrollment targets and hence, did not need to expand the pool of eligible participants.

In addition to ETA's criteria, a few programs instituted their own eligibility requirements. OLHSA in Pontiac, MI, required that individuals come from county correctional facilities. OLHSA served state prisoners for several years prior to the study, but because the state operated a prisoner re-entry initiative at the same location that was very similar to the RExO program and was available to all returning state prisoners, (the two programs were actually co-located at the same facility), there was concern that control-group designees could enroll in the state program and receive comparable services. Consequently, OLHSA began to serve only county jail participants, who were ineligible for the state program. Another grantee, the Episcopal Community Services in Baltimore, required all interested participants to pass a mandatory drug test in order to enroll.

Programs reviewed participants' criminal histories in order to verify eligibility for RExO. Hence, they typically relied on DOC databases to access such information. Some grantees encountered difficulties in obtaining the necessary information, which delayed their eligibility verification. In some of these cases, it simply took a long time for DOC to respond with the appropriate information, while in others RExO staff members were not able to request the information on their own and had to work through probation or parole. In the most challenging case, participants had to obtain their own records (for a $36 fee) and bring them to their intake appointments. Naturally, this slowed the site's intake process and placed more hardship on ex-offenders seeking services.

Recruitment

Most grantees intensified their efforts to conduct outreach and identify participants during Year 5. These RExO grantees had historically attracted large numbers of ex-offenders to participate in their programs and, after several years of program operation, generally did not need to recruit applicants prior to the implementation of RA. According to numerous RExO staff members, the RA study deterred some potential participants and reduced the number of referrals from

community partners, making it necessary to step up recruitment efforts. Staff members reported that the uncertainty of the RA process—the chance that an individual would be assigned to the control group—discouraged some ex-offenders; additionally, some individuals assigned to the control group returned to their communities and informed peers that they may be "turned away." As a result, fewer eligible individuals inquired about the program. Still, two programs with strong reputations and extensive community networks—Goodwill Industries of San Antonio, TX, and The Empowerment Program of Denver, CO—managed to attract so many participants that they did not need to recruit at all.

To reach the target groups that grantees have established, they recruited applicants through various means, including: (1) community outreach, (2) partner referrals, and (3) word of mouth.

Community Outreach

Grantees intensified their ongoing outreach to community partners, such as conducting weekly and even twice-weekly presentations at the offices of various community partners to recruit participants and establish relationships from which more referrals would result.

As grantees looked to increase enrollments by engaging in more frequent outreach, they also expanded the number of venues at which they actively recruited. Halfway houses were a prime example of this expansion strategy. Leading up to the first round of data collection, few projects had pursued halfway houses as a significant source of participants. Nearly all of the numerous programs that improved their rate of enrollment over time strengthened their relationships with local halfway houses. In some cases, managers met to establish referral partnerships with these organizations, but it was more common for RExO staff members to travel to the facilities to make presentations to residents. Probation and parole offices also became prime targets for outreach, as they were common sites for ex-offenders to visit. In a few cases, grantees were able to locate staff members at parole offices.

Some grantees began to make pre-release presentations to inmates at correctional facilities and participated in information events, which were designed for those expected to be released soon. However, it was difficult for programs to gain pre-release access to facilities without stable liaisons on site.[17]

Another key development in outreach strategy was the emergence of community information sessions, known in some areas as Parole and Community Team meetings. As ex-offenders were often required to attend these meetings as a condition of their supervision, various community

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[17] In the first several years of the grant, the U.S. Department of Justice provided grants to local correctional facilities. These grants funded an individual working within the state prison system who was tasked with coordinating referrals to the RExO grantee. When these grants ended, the staff positions were gone, and as a result, referrals to the RExO programs slowed down noticeably.

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stakeholders attended and set up information tables to attract participants, just as employers do at a career fair. Additionally, staff members from a few RExO programs went out into the community to distribute and post fliers at various high-traffic venues, including bus stops and pizza parlors.

Exhibit IV-1 lists the various venues at which grantees reported conducting outreach and reports the number of programs that targeted each type of venue. This exhibit shows that prisons/jails, halfway houses, and other community organizations made up a large proportion of venues where grantees conducted outreach.

Exhibit IV-1:
Number of Grantees Conducting Outreach at Each of Several Venues
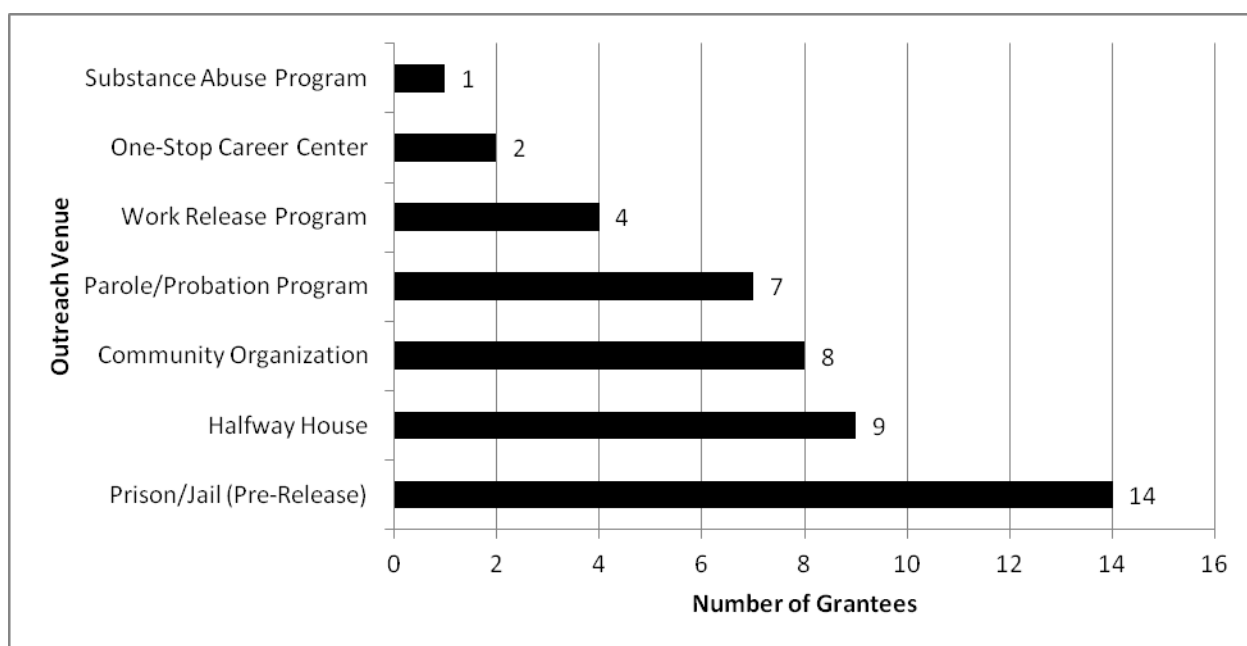
Partner Referrals

Over the years of the RExO program, grantees most commonly relied on referrals from various community partners to fill their program slots. Referral partners included criminal justice entities, supervision facilities, One-Stop Career Centers, and other community organizations. Many grantees also received referrals from substance abuse treatment centers, faith-based organizations, and alternative service providers. In many cases, the increased visibility that RExO gained in these organizations due to grantees' intensified recruitment efforts helped boost the willingness of these organizations' staff members to refer study participants on a regular basis.

Grantees established strong relationships with local corrections agencies, and as a result, relied on their referrals. However, the nature of these linkages shifted somewhat throughout the life of the grant, as the local contexts changed. First, the grant from DOJ to state corrections agencies

to support pre-release services ended. As a result, RExO staff members indicated that they lost their means of entry into correctional facilities. In some cases, instances of staff turnover at the facilities compounded the difficulty in establishing pre-release access to ex-offenders. The result is that, at the time of the site visits for this evaluation, just 10 of 24 grantees reported receiving referrals directly from their state's DOC or specific correctional facilities.

Probation and parole agencies were another significant source of referrals. Roughly two-thirds of grantees received some form of referral from any combination of probation and/or parole staff members. However, fewer such referrals occurred in Year 5 of the grant than in previous years. As part of the drive to increase enrollment, many grantees renewed their efforts to inform county supervision staff members more thoroughly of RExO's structure and potential benefits. Results were mixed across grantees: some developed formal partnerships with probation and parole offices, others connected with particular officers, and a handful did not draw any referrals. A well-resourced few coordinated with both local and Federal probation and parole officials.

Exhibit IV-2 lists the various partners that referred participants to RExO and reports the number of RExO grantees receiving referrals from each source at the time of the site visit.

Exhibit IV-2:

Number of Grantees Receiving Referrals from Each of Several Sources

Note: In some states, Department of Corrections comprises probation and parole offices. For the purpose of the table above, the DOC data refers specifically to referrals from correctional facilities.
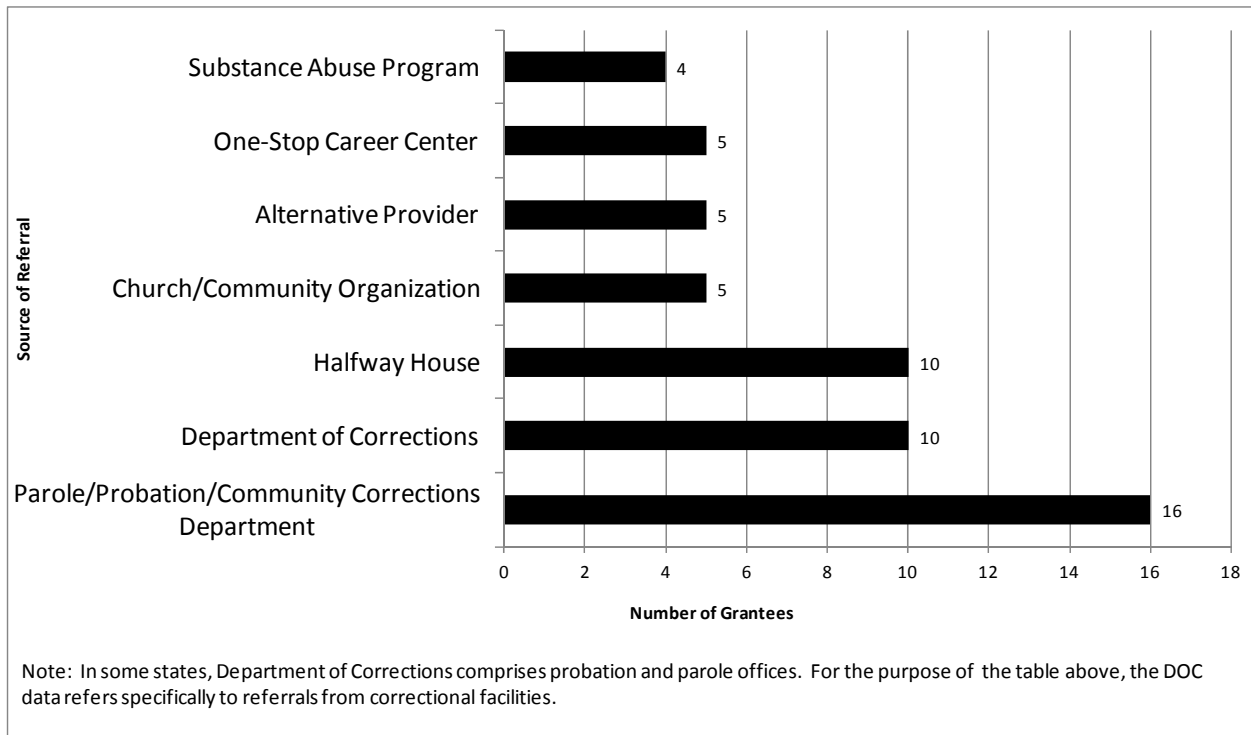
Word of Mouth

Word of mouth was the most frequently reported referral source. The words of current and former participants carried a great deal of weight, as they encouraged peers in correctional

facilities, halfway houses, treatment programs, and other community spaces to seek out RExO services. Accordingly, two sites, POCAAN of Seattle, WA, and the Primavera Foundation of Tucson, AZ, introduced incentive systems to encourage current program participants to refer their peers. Under these systems, a participant could receive a $10 gift card from a major retailer (POCAAN) or $10 in cash (Primavera Foundation) every time he or she referred a new participant who enrolled in the program.

Recruitment Challenges

Year 5 marked the first year that many grantees did not meet their enrollment targets, and even those that reached their goals took longer to do so. Regardless of whether they met their enrollment targets, the majority of grantees identified anxiety about the RA study as a major reason for their recruitment challenges.[18] Staff members cited conversations with community members, current participants, and criminal justice partners in asserting that the RA format made potential participants and partners uneasy, despite the fact that participants were more likely to be assigned to the program group than to the control group. According to respondents, the prospect of receiving a control-group assignment and not receiving services, after making an effort to learn about and sign up for the program, dissuaded many potential participants.

Furthermore, those assigned to the control group often returned to their communities and discouraged their peers from enrolling in the program. For similar reasons, some community partners also dissuaded their clients from participating in RExO. It was common for grantees to express the view that the negative publicity somewhat tarnished their community reputations. In the most challenging cases, several programs no longer had the cooperation of key correctional facilities and ex-offender supervision departments. The prospect of encouraging their clients to venture to obtain employment services, only to be turned away, initially disheartened supervision staff members, who generally aimed to build up their clients' confidence and stability.

Many RExO programs did not initially foresee that the RA study presented a recruitment challenge and did not have well-developed response plans in place from the outset. However, many projects responded appropriately, working more closely with their site liaisons as discussed in Chapter I, to refine and expand their recruitment strategies by reaching out to new sources of referrals or increasing their visits or presentations to existing referral sources.

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[18]   It is worth noting that not all grantees experienced difficulty recruiting. However, all did note that RA posed an unprecedented challenge during the process.

Intake and Pre-enrollment Procedures

Intake processes varied across the 24 grantees. Nevertheless, they all included these five basic steps:

1. The program staff held an orientation to introduce potential participants to the program and the study.

2. Those who agreed to participate submitted some basic information and gave their consent to undergo RA.

3. A program staff member confirmed the prospective participants' eligibility (and in some cases, suitability) for the program.

4. A staff member utilized a the standard RExO Web-based management information system (MIS) to assign each eligible applicant to the program group or the control group.

5. The staff member then notified the participants of the results of their RA and offered those assigned to the control group some minimal information about alternative services available to them.

Grantees conducted orientation sessions for prospective participants to introduce the RExO program and explain the RA study process. Most commonly, these sessions occurred in a group setting, so that staff members could apprise multiple individuals of the details of the program at the same time. The sessions typically lasted between one and three hours, and nearly all featured the video produced by the evaluation team that described the study and what it meant to be a participant in it.[19] Four sites offered orientations lasting a full day, or even multiple days. These longer meetings typically entailed life skills training and preparation for employment, providing skills and knowledge potentially useful to any ex-offender. As several grantees expressed disappointment with their inability to serve everyone, the extended orientations may have served as opportunities to provide basic services to all interested patrons prior to RA.

Less frequently, grantees conducted one-on-one orientations, in which a RExO staff member presented all of the aforementioned information, interviewed the incoming participant, collected baseline information, informed her or him about the study (including showing the RExO orientation video), and answered questions. While this format was more likely to generate a scheduling backlog than the group approach, it allowed staff members to cover more ground in one sitting.

Several programs implemented changes between the first and second rounds of site visits (conducted in the Spring and Fall of 2010, respectively) to create a more convenient orientation

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[19] Two programs opted not to show the video, as they believed potential study participants did not respond well to it; they also found it easier to explain all the details themselves.

process that would attract more study participants. Most commonly, programs increased the frequency of their meetings; several went from offering one session per week to offering two. Roughly a quarter of grantees also created opportunities for walk-in meetings so that ex-offenders did not need to wait or arrange additional transportation to return (transportation was often a prohibitive cost for program participants). This strategy reduced the time that elapsed between initial contact and enrollment. Further, in an effort to reduce the attrition that occurred during the early stages of the process, several sites reduced the duration of their orientation sessions. Although this change helped increase enrollments, some staff members were disappointed that it effectively curtailed what had been a natural pre-screening process.

Following the orientation, those who agreed to participate in the program typically provided background information that helped determine their eligibility for the program. Several factors determined how long after orientation RA took place. In cases in which sites held their orientations prior to confirming eligibility, it sometimes took several days before staff members could obtain the necessary information (usually from the DOCs, probation, or parole), thereby delaying RA. Participants also submitted a contact sheet and a form indicating consent to RA. Prior to the implementation of RA, the time following the orientation marked the point at which programs would also conduct their suitability screening (this change is discussed further below).

The heavy workload of staff responsible for intake—usually case managers—often limited the frequency and timing of RA.[20] Case managers often had to balance recruitment, intake, assessment, and case management of current participants, and many of them reported that they could only conduct RA one day each week. Hence, a participant might have gone through orientation on a Tuesday, but not been randomly assigned until the following Monday. About half of the programs with group orientation sessions often elected to wait until all attendees had left the office before they conducted the RA, which sometimes delayed the process.

The study prolonged the duration of the process. RExO staff members often noted that longer gaps in time between orientation and RA tended to yield greater attrition prior to enrollment among those in the program group. The period between assignment and notification also contributed to that gap. There were challenges in determining eligibility discussed earlier in the chapter or choices grantees made in how they structured their intake processes around RA. Staff members generally notified participants of their status in person, on the same day of their RA. Some, however, wanted to avoid informing program group and control group participants in the same spaces and thus waited to contact individuals via phone, postal service, or email. In a

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[20]   Some programs employed intake coordinators to conduct RA, but this was not very common. As discussed in Chapter II, intake coordinators accounted for just a small percentage of grantee staff members.

couple cases, case managers scheduled follow-up appointments and waited until this time to notify individuals of their status.

Those individuals assigned to the program group were officially enrolled in the program when they received their program group designation. The point at which case managers entered new enrollees into the MIS varied, but usually occurred on the same day as their RA or at the first case management and assessment meeting.

The programs varied in their offerings to control group members following RA. Most provided them with a list of alternative providers from which they could pursue services. Only one program did not provide such a list and instead sent individuals back to their original referral sources to seek alternatives. The evaluation team offered grantees $2,000 each, and most of the grantees opted to provide participants—regardless of whether they were assigned to the program or control group—with gift cards, which were most commonly valued at $10 and could be used with a local retail store. In a few cases, grantees supplemented the cards with bus tokens.

RExO staff members reported some logistical and philosophical challenges with the RA process. On the logistical side, about a quarter of programs reported having had some difficulty with attrition following RA and prior to the first service meeting, as individuals who agreed to participate in the study and were assigned to the program group subsequently did not follow through and participate in the program. However, staff members were more passionate about how the RA study ran counter to their philosophies of serving all those they deemed deserving. Many of these organizations prided themselves on multiple-decade histories of serving high-need ex-offenders (among others) within their communities. Hence, staff members often were uncomfortable with turning individuals away, as they felt it ran counter to the missions of their organizations. Still, there was some capacity to serve potential participants that demonstrated great need. Each site had up to 10 "wildcard" slots at its disposal, which allowed them to designate such individuals to bypass RA and immediately enroll in program-group services.

Some believed the recruitment challenges associated with the RA study and the resulting need to increase their enrollment into the study effectively curtailed the pre-screening practices that usually occurred during intake. In previous years of the grant, many of the grantees had implemented suitability screening protocols as a means of identifying those participants who would be fully committed to the program. Through these processes, program staff members used their own indicators as well as ETA's criteria to establish whether someone would be likely to complete the program and secure employment. More specifically, the grantees generally constructed various questions or procedures to gauge potential participants' motivations to obtain work and reform their lives and to identify glaring "red flags" that suggested a particularly low likelihood of obtaining employment. Another mode of screening involved grantees inserting additional steps into their processes prior to RA, which effectively tested individuals'

commitment levels. Despite these challenges, two grantees in particular managed to enact strategies to ensure some level of commitment among study participants and still enrolled 200 or more participants. Talbert House of Cincinnati required prospective study participants to attend the orientation, sit for an intake interview with multiple staff members, and return for a follow-up appointment. Talbert House case managers estimated that 30 percent of those who attended the intake interview did not return for the follow-up appointment, which they believed helped strengthen their pool of candidates. Urban League of Greater Dallas and North Central Texas utilized a similar approach in that it offered an extended (weeklong) orientation and subjected all interested participants to an interview panel in which they were asked to explain their goals and motivations for participation in the program.

Despite the two aforementioned grantees' successes in reaching their enrollment goals, most sites that screened for suitability prior to Year 5 significantly scaled back or suspended the process for that year.

Assessment of Enrolled Program Participants

Once participants enrolled in RExO, their skills and abilities were assessed. This process was very informal in the majority of the sites. It usually involved completing a questionnaire about their goals, background, work history, educational history, skills, and criminal background. Additionally, some programs designed special-purpose forms such as a "values checklist," a "stability checklist," and internal substance abuse assessments. Staff members frequently relied on participants to self-report all of the information and did not usually provide any objective measures of skills capacity or compatibility with certain sectors. A few sites, however, utilized technical tools during the initial assessment. These included the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE), the Barriers to Employment Success Inventory, the Level of Service Inventory, and the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System. Of these, TABE was the only assessment reportedly utilized by more than one grantee, but only three used it on a regular basis (a few more sites use it on an as-needed basis, when a participant reported a particularly low education level). Using the information provided during the assessment session, case managers helped program participants set goals and determine which services they would utilize over the course of their enrollment. This also marked the point at which case managers made referrals for supplemental services such as substance abuse treatment, food bank assistance, and personal care supplies. It was also common for them to provide aid such as bus tokens, clothes, or gift cards.

Summary

This chapter has described the processes through which RExO projects managed and facilitated participant entry into their programs.

Anticipating contraction of the pool of available and willing participants as a result of the implementation of RA, ETA expanded the eligibility requirements so that RExO programs could serve individuals with histories of violent crime. While a significant majority of grantees adopted ETA's expanded eligibility parameters, a few limited (either by choice or compulsion) participant access based on other factors, namely the type of institution from which individuals were released.

In previous years of the RExO award, most grantee staff noted that they had a steady stream of program applicants. However, the implementation of the RA study reduced the pool of willing participants, because many ex-offenders were uncertain about the prospect of being assigned to the control group and receiving no services after making an effort to satisfy enrollment requirements. Consequently, many grantees discovered early in Year 5 that their enrollments were proceeding far more slowly than usual. In response, programs curtailed participant pre-screening protocols that they had implemented for the previous four years of the grant and took other steps to make it easier for ex-offenders to enroll. In addition, all but a few projects significantly intensified their recruitment efforts.

To address the recruitment challenges that surfaced, staff members cast wider nets in their outreach. The most notable outreach targets and referral sources in Year 5 were probation and parole offices and halfway houses. RExO programs also increased the frequency with which they attended meetings and made presentations to prospective partners and participants. Despite these efforts, staff members reported that the most prevalent referral source remained the word-of-mouth recommendations of former and current participants.

The RExO programs typically offered group orientation sessions to provide an overview of the program and explain the RA study. Those grantees that held sessions that spanned an entire day or multiple days generally consolidated them during this most recent phase of the grant. Given the aforementioned recruitment challenges, they could ill afford the attrition associated with longer meetings. Additionally, projects that held individual orientation meetings were able to expedite their intake processes. Grantees also adjusted their intake and enrollment procedures in order to implement the RA process. Some grantees moved RA forward in their intake and enrollment process, using fewer steps to screen candidates for suitability and willingness to participate. A few grantees experienced difficulties with these changes while others managed to work in adequate suitability screening that occurred in a more limited fashion than it had previously.

Prior to receiving their first core services, program group participants filled out assessment forms detailing their interests, goals, educational backgrounds, work experience, and skills. These forms also helped their case managers develop appropriate service plans. Whereas several grantees had previously required program participants to complete pre-enrollment activities, such

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as job readiness training, prior to official enrollment, most did away with this practice for Year 5 as a means of preserving their enrollment numbers. Accordingly, attendance at the first job readiness session or the first case management meeting usually constituted the point of first service. Almost all control group participants received a list of referrals to alternative providers, and most sites offered them gift cards to local retailers and/or bus tickets (as was done for members of the program group). The following chapter describes in greater detail the implementation and outcomes of RA.

V.   RESULTS FROM RANDOM ASSIGNMENT

This evaluation uses RA to establish two groups, including a program group that is intended to receive RExO services and a control group that is not enrolled in the RExO program. Because assignment to these two groups is random, the two groups should not differ systematically from one another at the outset of the impact study. Thus, any differences between them on the outcomes of interest are attributable to the RExO program, rather than to preexisting differences between the groups. This chapter describes the RA procedures put in place by the RExO grantees, summarizes the number of study participants randomly assigned to each of the two groups, and describes the resulting characteristics of these two groups.

Implementing Random Assignment

Successful implementation of RA required two overarching decisions. The first was identifying the appropriate point at which to place RA within the intake and enrollment process of RExO programs. The second was developing the specific procedures that would be used to make the assignments. These two areas are discussed in turn below.

Point of Random Assignment

A critical decision, both from a design standpoint and from the perspective of the grantees, was where the actual point of RA would be placed. All of the grantees had well-established intake and enrollment procedures and were justifiably concerned about how a RA process would affect these procedures or add burden to their workload. In nearly all sites, grantees had established some assessment and screening procedures to ensure that potential participants: (1) were eligible, (2) were deemed suitable for the program, and, in some sites, (3) demonstrated a level of engagement or commitment to participating fully in the program. The level of intensity of these procedures varied substantially across sites, so that in some sites a potential participant needed only to meet the basic eligibility criteria and express interest in participating before being enrolled, while in other sites potential participants underwent multiple assessments and were required to participate in multi-day workshops before they were enrolled.

This raised a fundamental tension for grantees who: (a) wanted to implement RA early in the screening process so that they did not have to turn potential clients away after already having

significant face-to-face contact, but also (b) wanted to implement RA later after their typical processes to screen for suitability so that they were not enrolling RExO clients that they believed were not appropriate for their programs. These conflicting concerns gave rise to the tension of whether the point of RA should be earlier or later, and grantees and their partners ultimately expressed comfort at different points along this continuum. This choice had important ramifications for the evaluation, both because it involved developing procedures to fit each grantee, and because it can affect the analysis. The earlier the point of RA, the more individuals would be assigned to the program group who did not end up receiving substantial services from the grantee (because they did not fully engage in the program). Despite not receiving the full "treatment," these individuals must remain in the program group for the analysis, thereby likely decreasing the average impacts observed. Thus, to the extent that certain grantees had a higher percentage of program-group participants who did not receive the "full" treatment, or even any of it, this reduces the service contrast (i.e., the difference in the level of services received between program- and control-group members) within that site.

Though the exact point of RA varied across the grantees, generally speaking, grantees and their partners identified a point between the initial orientation provided to potential participants and the last screening process or assessment at which RA would be feasible. Given the variation among grantees in their intake and enrollment procedures, described in Chapter IV, it is likely unsurprising that there was similar variation in the point at which the grantees were comfortable in implementing RA. In some cases, grantees felt that once a potential participant had made a single contact (or undergone a single assessment), he or she should then be randomly assigned. Other grantees felt that allowing an individual they had only seen once to be assigned to participate in their program would change the characteristics of their clients. These grantees thus preferred to delay the point of RA until the grantee concluded its normal screening for suitability, which typically entailed requiring potential participants to complete paperwork, attend an event or two, or otherwise demonstrate their commitment to participating fully in the program.

Unlike the majority of grantees whose program activities occurred only post-release, in a few cases, such as St. Patrick Center in St. Louis, Connections to Success in Kansas City, and The Director's Council in Des Moines, grantee staff commonly held orientations in the prisons while individuals were still incarcerated. In these sites, grantee staff and their partners initially expressed a desire for the RA process to occur while potential participants were still incarcerated, and thus before the grantee had contact with the individual post-release. They viewed this as appropriate because RExO staff typically began meeting with potential participants prior to release; hence knowing individuals' assignment group at that point would have enabled RExO staff to continue to meet only with those in the treatment group. Further, parole officers felt this would enable them to refer those in the control group to alternative providers upon release. Ultimately, however, due to the logistical difficulties of implementing

RA within the prisons, and due to concerns about participants assigned to the program group not staying in contact with the grantee post-release, only St. Patrick Center conducted RA prior to participants' release from prison.[21]

A distinct advantage to allowing variation in the point of RA was that it enhanced the feasibility of implementing the evaluation because the procedures were tailored to meet grantees' (and their partners') comfort level, and were thus implemented in a manner that was least burdensome to the existing intake and enrollment procedures. By tailoring the point of RA in this way, the characteristics of the clients served by grantees did not need to be changed, which theoretically meant that the evaluation would be of the program as it had been operating, rather than asking grantees to change anything in their procedures to accommodate a modified enrollment process.[22]

Ultimately, grantees established three distinct types of RA procedures (the number of grantees adopting each model is shown in Exhibit V-1):

- **Pre-Release RA** *(Model 1)*. As described above, only St. Patrick Center in St. Louis opted to implement RA while potential participants were still incarcerated.

- **Post-Release RA**. In most sites, RExO staff members did not meet one-on-one with potential participants until after release (though they may have provided orientation sessions to groups of individuals who were still incarcerated). Thus, the remaining 23 grantees ultimately concluded that the appropriate timing of RA (and enrollment into RExO, for those assigned to the program group) would be after a potential participant had made contact with the grantee after her/his release. Grantees developed two different versions of this general approach:

  - **RA concurrent with intake** (*Model 2*). Fifteen grantees enrolled potential participants after an initial orientation to the program (which occured pre- or post-release, depending on the grantee) and after determining their eligibility. For this group of grantees, study intake procedures—informing potential participants about the study, securing their consent and randomly assigning them—were designed

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[21] In addition, St. Patrick Center supplemented this approach with "walk-ins" who were randomly assigned after their release from prison. As the project neared its end, this supplemental recruitment became more important, since many of those assigned to the program group while incarcerated still had several months prior to their release, and thus the grantee could not be certain there would be adequate time to serve such individuals. The fact that one site implemented RA prior to release affected the procedures necessary to secure Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the study. Thus, the IRB review for the project included these additional requirements, including having a prisoner representative be on the IRB and separately addressing several questions specific to research with prisoners.

[22] As will be detailed in the "challenges" section below, this potential advantage was subsequently reduced because grantees needed to limit their screening to ensure that they would enroll sufficient numbers of participants into the study.

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to take place either at the intake and orientation meeting or shortly thereafter.

- **RA after screening** (*Model 3*). Eight sites had enacted various screening procedures (such as assessments or required attendance at specific workshops) that potential participants had to undergo prior to being enrolled in the program. These grantees devised these activities and workshops as a way to assess participant commitment to and suitability for the program. These sites felt that the appropriate timing of RA was after some or all of these screening steps had occurred. Though these grantees informed participants prior to screening activities that there was a possibility that they may not be enrolled in the program, study intake procedures did not begin until after screening occurred and they had determined which candidates were suitable.[23]

Exhibit V-1:

Models of Random Assignment

Model for Random Assignment	Number of Grantees Implementing
Model 1 (pre-release)	1
Model 2 (RA concurrent with intake)	15
Model 3 (RA after screening)	8

Nearly all grantees therefore adopted RA procedures that required potential participants to come to the grantees' offices at least one time, to learn about the program and the study, and to complete all relevant paperwork (described below). An important advantage of enabling grantees to have some contact with potential participants prior to the point of RA was that it increased the likelihood that a high percentage of the treatment group, in fact, received the treatment. At the same time, the procedure ensured that all potential participants received some service from the grantee. Especially for grantees that implemented Model 3, members of the

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[23] Several of these grantees experienced difficulties early in the intake period with low numbers of enrollees, in part because they were screening out a substantial number of clients. Thus, over time many of them relaxed their screening procedures in order to ensure they could enroll a sufficient number of participants into the study (and their programs).

control group received at least an assessment and, in a few cases, several days of a workshop or counseling. In these sites, then, members of the control group received at least a portion of the "treatment" itself.[24]

Another disadvantage of implementing RA at varying points along the continuum of grantees' intake processes was that it will make the analysis of impacts across the sites more complicated, because there was not a single point at which participants in the study were randomly assigned. Because the services offered by grantees and their partners varied substantially, as is described in the subsequent chapters of this report, and the point at which RA took place varied, there is no single program model that defines RExO. Rather, when considering the impact of the program overall, what constitutes the program varies across sites. As a result, the analysis of impacts will therefore be of the RExO funding stream rather than of a single program model, because what constitutes the program varied, as did the point at which a program "began" (i.e., the point of RA).

Random Assignment Procedures

Although the point at which RA was conducted varied substantially across the grantees, the specific steps necessary to conduct it were the same. To enroll an interested and eligible individual into the study, grantee staff members followed seven specific steps to provide the participant with a full orientation to the study and the RA process, including:[25]

1. showing the potential participant a video that described the study, outlined its purposes and procedures, summarized the informed consent form, and described the roles and requirements of both RExO staff members and the potential participant;

2. discussing the informed consent form with the potential participant;

3. providing the potential participant with an opportunity to ask questions about the study;

4. if s/he was amenable, having the participant sign the informed consent form;

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[24] In each case, care was taken to ensure that the program group would receive substantially more services. Many grantees viewed this tradeoff positively, because it meant that they were not fully denying service to anyone.

[25] The exception to this process was that grantees were each given a small number of "wild cards" who could be enrolled directly into the program, prior to random assignment, and who were not included as members of the study. The percentage of wild cards was capped at no more than five percent of a grantee's total number of participants, or no more than ten, assuming the grantee reached its target of 200 participants.

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5. collecting baseline data;[26]

6. using a Web-based system to randomly assign the study participant to the program group or control group; and[27]

7. informing the study participant of the results of RA and explaining the implications of the assignment and the participant's next steps.

There were no differences in the study enrollment process between program and control group members, although as described above there was some variation in this process across grantees. Individuals randomly assigned to the program group were expected to begin participating in the RExO program immediately. Those randomly assigned to the control group were embargoed from enrolling in RExO for at least 12 months. Furthermore, grantees were informed that they could not provide other RExO-like services (i.e., employment or mentoring) to control group members, even if those services were not funded by ETA. Control group members were informed that they could seek employment and reentry services available from other providers in the community. In nearly all sites, RExO grantees provided control group members with a list of alternative services in their community.[28] In two sites, grantees provided direct referrals.

Grantees were also offered funds from the evaluation budget to provide small stipends to both program and control group participants to reimburse them for the time it took to complete the baseline data and provide contact information to the evaluation team. Twenty of the grantees used these funds and provided participants in both groups $10 gift cards once they had completed the RA process.

Study Participants

In assessing the targeted sample size, one must balance the competing demands of the number of individuals a grantee could reasonably recruit and serve, given the level of funding it received, against the fact that, as the number of individuals in the study increases, so too does its statistical

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[26] Baseline data on RExO program participants were already collected through the MIS that was created by DOL. Data items collected and entered included: Name, social security number, Date of Birth, Address, Gender, Race, Ethnicity, Non-violent offender status, Employment Status at Incarceration, Employment Status at Enrollment, Highest School Grade Completed, Criminal Justice System Identifier, Type of Criminal Justice Identifier, Date of Release, Type of Institution (e.g., Federal prison, state prison, county jail), Post-Release Status (e.g., parole, probation, other criminal justice/court supervision, none), several contact fields, Eligible Veteran Status, and Disability Status.

[27] This system required staff members to enter in the participant's social security number, date of birth, criminal justice identifiers, and to confirm the individual had provided his or her signed consent to participate in the study. Once this information was submitted, the assignment was provided within seconds to the staff member.

[28] In most cases, these lists were either already in existence and regularly provided to those who were not eligible or appropriate for the program. In a few cases, existing lists were modified slightly for use as part of this study.

power. Additionally, to the extent possible, an evaluation should not arbitrarily limit the number of individuals that are assigned to the program group to such an extent that program slots that otherwise could be given to interested participants remain unfilled. Thus, ideally, each site would have recruited an appropriate number of individuals into the study both to provide a sufficient control group while at the same time ensuring that all available program slots were filled by those assigned to the program group.

As described in Chapter III, each of the 24 grantees had been able to meet its enrollment targets during the first three years of the program. In discussions with the grantees during the initial visits to each one that took place in 2009 in preparation for the evaluation, grantees almost uniformly indicated that they would be able to continue their past rates of recruitment and enrollment during the period in which RA would be in place. Despite this confidence, prior studies have observed that when RA is introduced there can be a noticeable decline in the number of enrollees. This situation can be due to individuals refusing to participate in the study, or shying away from seeking services because they have heard that enrollment is no longer assured. As described in Chapter IV, partially in response to this concern, at the request of the evaluation team, ETA agreed to relax the eligibility criteria to allow those with a previous violent offense (provided it was not their current offense) to be served by the program, which was anticipated to expand the potential pool of participants substantially. Given these considerations, ETA established recruitment targets of 200 participants for each grantee.

Further, during the initial discussions, grantees indicated that if they could serve more offenders than they were required to turn away, this would be far preferable to them and would make recruitment more successful. Thus, though equally dividing the study pool into program- and control-group members would have yielded the greatest statistical precision, the evaluation deviated slightly from this statistical ideal and assigned a greater percentage of participants to the program group. The final balance between the groups was set at 60 percent to the program group (or 120 participants per grantee) and 40 percent to the control group (80 participants per grantee).

The first individuals were enrolled into the study in late January 2010, when one grantee implemented RA. The remaining grantees implemented RA between February 1 and April 1, 2010. Eight sites implemented RA in February. An additional fourteen implemented in March. The final grantee implemented in April 2010. Grantees continued enrolling individuals into the study for the remainder of the calendar year or, in two cases, into early 2011 in any effort to reach the target of 200 study participants.[29]

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[29] Two grantees continued enrolling individuals into the study through January 2011.

Exhibit V-2:
Number Randomly Assigned by Each Grantee

Grantee Site	Location	Program Group	Control Group	Total
Episcopal Community Services of Maryland	Baltimore, MD	121	80	201
Church United for Community Development	Baton Rouge, LA	110	75	185
Span, Inc.	Boston, MA	111	72	18
Safer Foundation	Chicago, IL	68	45	113
Talbert House	Cincinnati, OH	124	83	20
Urban League of Greater Dallas & North Central Texas	Dallas, TX	123	81	204
The Empowerment Program	Denver, CO	131	86	21
The Directors' Council	Des Moines, IA	120	80	200
Career Opportunity Development	Egg Harbor, NJ	121	79	20
OIC of Broward County	Fort Lauderdale, FL	117	74	191
Fresno Career Development Institute	Fresno, CA	120	80	20
Community Partners in Action	Hartford, CT	109	70	179
Connections to Success	Kansas City, MO	89	60	14
Odyssey House Louisiana	New Orleans, LA	120	82	202
Connection Training Services	Philadelphia, PA	155	105	26
AWEE	Phoenix, AZ	120	80	200
OLSHA	Pontiac, MI	86	55	14
SE Works	Portland, OR	123	81	204
(MAAP.	Sacramento, CA	127	82	20
Goodwill Industries	San Antonio, TX	123	81	204
Metro United Methodist Urban Ministries	San Diego, CA	123	82	20
(POCAAN	Seattle, WA	119	78	197
St. Patrick Center	St. Louis, MO	119	80	19
Primavera Foundation	Tucson, AZ	125	85	210
Total		**2,804**	**1,856**	**4,6**

Note: In addition, 71 individuals were designated as wild cards.

Source: Random assignment system data

A total of 4,660 individuals was enrolled into the study, including 2,804 program-group members (60.2 percent) and 1,856 control-group members (59.8 percent).[30] Exhibit V-2 displays the number of participants for each of the grantee sites. As can be seen in this exhibit, the average number of participants across grantees was 194.2. Fifteen of the grantees achieved their target of 200 participants, including three that exceeded this target by at least ten participants. An additional three enrolled at least 190 participants. Only three grantees enrolled fewer than 150 participants. Enrollment into the study was initially slow, especially since grantees implemented RA at varying times, and thus there were fewer grantees enrolling participants during the initial few months. Exhibit V-3 displays the number of enrollments for each month.

Exhibit V-3:
Number Randomly Assigned by Week

Month	Participants Enrolled
January 2010	8
February	96
March	391
April	389
May	359
June	512
July	410
August	620
September	531
October	489
November	514
December	317
January 2011	24
Total	**4,660**

Source: Random assignment system data

As can be seen in this table, enrollment accelerated substantially beginning June 2010. In part, this was due to RA being fully implemented by all grantees. Additionally, however, in response to the slow rate of enrollment in the first few months, the evaluation team conducted a webinar in

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[30] One additional person was randomly assigned to the program group, but was subsequently determined to be ineligible for the program. This individual was removed from the total numbers shown here. Additionally, three individuals, all members of the control group, asked to be removed from the study. These are included in the totals shown here, but no further data will be collected for them.

late May, which reiterated the importance of meeting enrollment targets, and featured "best practice" lessons learned by grantees that had been successful in recruitment to that date. This webinar, which was attended by at least one representative from each of the grantees, as well as ETA and the evaluation team, seems to have contributed to increasing the pace of enrollments into the study. Additionally, site liaisons worked extensively with those grantees experiencing slow enrollment. This work included weekly or bi-weekly phone calls, as well as visits to grantees to discuss the recruitment challenges, brainstorm possible strategies for overcoming them, and monitoring implementation of these strategies. These efforts also likely contributed to the increased rate of enrollment over time.

Characteristics of Participants

It is critical that the RA process work properly. If it does, the characteristics of those in the program and control groups should be approximately identical. While it is expected that some minor variations in study participant characteristics may be apparent between the two groups, generally these characteristics should be approximately equivalent. Exhibit V-4 displays the key characteristics for both the program and control groups.

Exhibit V-4:
Characteristics of Program and Control Group

Characteristic	Program Group	Control Group
Age		
18-19	1.6%	1.1%
20-24	12.8%	11.8%
25-34	32.2%	35.5%*
35-44	29.0%	29.4%
45-54	21.1%	18.3%**
55+	3.4%	3.8%
Gender		
Male	80.6%	81.7%
Female	19.4%	18.3%
Race and Ethnicity		
White	33.1%	32.1%
Black	50.9%	52.1%
Asian	0.9%	0.8%
Hawaiian/Pac. Islander	0.6%	0.3%
Native American	2.8%	2.3%
No Race Recorded	13.1%	13.7%

Characteristic	Program Group	Control Group
Hispanic	17.9%	17.2%
Education		
8th Grade or Less	3.4%	3.6%
Some high school	42.6%	43.7%
HS Diploma/GED	42.2%	41.5%
Some College	9.9%	9.0%
College Graduate +	1.6%	2.0%
Post-Release Status		
Probation	28.2%	27.5%
Parole	49.7%	52.6%*
Other Supervision	8.4%	6.4%**
None	13.7%	13.6%
Type of Institution		
Federal Prison	11.2%	11.1%
State Prison	67.5%	68.1%
County or City Jail	21.3%	20.9%
Other Characteristics		
Disability	6.2%	5.7%
Non-violent Offender	93.5%	93.1%
Employment Status at Entry	3.4%	3.7%
Average Number of Months Since Release	0.95	1.03

*Note: * = p < .05; ** = p < .01*

Source: Random assignment system data

As can be seen in this exhibit, there are a few minor differences in characteristics between the program and control groups. Specifically, the control group was more likely to be between 25 and 34 years old at the time of RA, while the program group was more likely to be between 45 and 54 years old. Further, the program group was somewhat less likely to be on parole than the control group, and somewhat more likely to be on some other form of supervision. Generally, however, the characteristics are similar between the two groups, which is the expected outcome when assignment to the groups is done at random. Even with such a large number of participants in each of the two groups, which increases the likelihood that one will observe statistically significant differences, there are few such differences between these two groups.

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Results from RA indicate that the process worked as intended, and there are minimal differences in characteristics between the two groups. Further, grantees generally were able to conduct RA with few reported problems or concerns. This, too, indicates the process functioned as intended, which implies that comparisons of outcomes for the two groups, to be completed as part of the Impact Report, will produce an unbiased estimate of the impact of RExO.

Summary

This chapter summarized the development and implementation of RA across the 24 grantees, and summarized the number of participants randomly assigned and their characteristics. The RA process was implemented smoothly by nearly all grantees, though the exact point at which participants were assigned varied across the grantees. One grantee implemented RA prior to participants being released from incarceration, while the remaining grantees assigned participants only after they had made contact with the grantee post-release. There were two general models of post-release RA, one in which the assignment was made in conjunction with an orientation to the program at an initial meeting with the participant, and the other only after some screening and assessments were conducted to ensure the participant was a good fit for the program and was sufficiently motivated to participate in it. Many of the grantees that adopted this latter model dropped much of their screening process and gravitated toward the former model after seeing poor early enrollment rates.

Because there was substantial variation both in the services provided under RExO and the point at which individuals were assigned, the impact analysis will be affected to some degree. Specifically, there was not a single program model that was employed, nor a uniform point at which individuals were assigned; hence, the impact analysis will technically be of the RExO funding stream, rather than of a specific program model or approach. While this is quite common in evaluations of existing programs that have developed somewhat independently, it is important to note in advance of the Impact Report.

A total of 4,660 individuals was assigned to either the program group (2,804, or 60.2 percent) or the control group (1,856, or 39.8 percent). While enrollment began slowly, it accelerated in June and continued at the increased pace through December, when nearly all grantees discontinued intake. Fifteen of the grantees reached their target of 200 participants (and an additional three reached at least 190), while only three grantees enrolled fewer than 150 participants.

Most participants were male (81 percent), between 25 and 44 years old (63 percent), and African-American (51 percent). Nearly 18 percent were Hispanic. Most had either completed some high school (43 percent) or had a high school diploma or GED (42 percent). Nearly all participants were nonviolent offenders (93 percent), reflecting the ban during the first four years of the program on serving violent offenders. About one-fourth of all participants were on

probation (28 percent), and one-half were on parole (51 percent). Overall, there are very few differences between the two groups, suggesting the random assignment process operated as intended.

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VI. REXO SERVICES

To achieve its goal of helping ex-offenders find stable employment and thereby avoid recidivating, the RExO program provided ex-offenders with three core services: case management, employment services, and mentoring. Grantees implemented these three service elements with considerable complexity and richness; as a result, the overall slate of services and the path by which program participants experienced them varied considerably from grantee to grantee. In addition, grantees and other providers in their communities offered a variety of other services of which program participants might have taken advantage.

This chapter identifies and categorizes the various services grantees offered to participants through their RExO programs. The chapter starts with an overview of these services, breaking them down into their component parts and identifying the ways in which these services are sequenced and delivered. It then examines in some detail each of the core RExO services—case management, employment services and mentoring—weaving in examples of participant experiences drawn from the 116 case files that the study team reviewed and data drawn from the MIS. The chapter then concludes with a discussion of the challenges that grantees encountered in implementing these services.

Overview of RExO Services

The solicitation for grant applications for the RExO program suggests that grantees make a number of services available to ex-offenders, including the core services noted above and other services such as referrals to housing, substance abuse treatment, and other supportive services. However, each grantee was given significant leeway in designing and delivering each of these services. The sections below discuss the various approaches grantees took in designing and delivering these services for ex-offenders.

Core RExO Services

Grantees provided a comprehensive service package that was available directly through the RExO grantee or coordinated with a network of community providers. Although each grantee provided all the core services, there was variation in the specific types of services made available

in each core-service category. Exhibit VI-1 provides an overview of the services, showing how many grantees offered each specific service.

Exhibit VI-1:
Overview of Services Provided by RExO Grantees

Service	Number of Grantees
Case Management Services	
Case management	All
Supportive services	All
Follow-up services	All
Employment Services	
Work readiness training	22
Job search assistance and job placement	All
Education and vocational training	All[1]
Transitional employment/trial employment	7
Mentoring[2]	
Individual mentoring	18
Group mentoring	23

[1] *All grantees make these services available either directly or through referrals.*

[2] *All grantees offer at least one type of mentoring. Mentoring numbers are duplicative because approximately 17 grantees offer both individual and group mentoring.*

The exhibit shows that all RExO grantees offered a combination of services that included, at minimum, intensive case management, supportive services, follow-up services, job search and job placement assistance, and at least one type of mentoring. Nearly all grantees offered work readiness training, and about one-third offered transitional jobs or trial employment. All grantees made additional education and vocational training available through referrals to other providers.

RExO programs offered all of these services prior to the study and continued to offer them during the study enrollment period. However, some grantees adjusted the sequence of some of their services; most prominently, some changed the timing for delivering work readiness training. Prior to the study, a number of grantees offered work readiness training before enrollment, to test applicants' interest and commitment to the RExO program. Applicants who did not complete the work readiness training were not enrolled in the program. When the study was implemented, some grantees made work readiness training available only after enrollment,

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both because they were concerned about enrolling a sufficient number of participants and to ensure that the control group would not receive these services from the RExO program.

Service Flow and Service Delivery Sequence

As discussed in Chapter IV, the intake and random assignment process occurred once applicants completed the required paperwork, which included signing consent forms and proving eligibility. Control and program group members typically were given a small stipend for their time, such as a $10 gift card and/or bus tokens.

At three grantees, service flow worked a little differently.[31] These grantees offered a class on work readiness skills prior to random assignment that was open to all applicants. Unlike the class for program participants discussed below, this class lasted about half a day and covered topics such as résumé building, interviewing techniques, and time management. Once program participants were assigned at these three sites, they continued with a more in-depth curriculum, described below.

Program group participants at all the sites received a full array of services, which started when they were assessed and continued when they met with case managers to develop their service plans. As shown in Exhibit VI-2, there were two general approaches to structuring service delivery after the assessment process—one worked toward the goal of securing immediate employment, and the other emphasized preparing the participant for employment by delivering supportive services before job search assistance. Regardless of which path participants took, they were offered the full array of RExO program services.

The first approach, which the study team refers to as Pathway 1: Secure Immediate Employment, was used by 16 grantees. Under this approach, grantees prioritized employment as the first key step in an ex-offender's transition out of prison. When participants followed this path, they were usually enrolled in work readiness training immediately after enrollment and at the same time began to work with a job developer to identify job leads. This way, participants increased their chances of earning income immediately so that they could make headway in other aspects of their lives, such as securing permanent housing. This was important, as many participants who lived in transitional housing were required to pay rent, and some were required to find a job within a short timeframe. For example, a large proportion of participants at the Empowerment Program in Denver, CO lived in transitional housing facilities that charged $17 a day for a bed. As a result, program staff members tried to place RExO participants into transitional or temporary jobs immediately to help pay for these costs.

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[31]   The Empowerment Program, Denver, CO; the Urban League of Greater Dallas and North Central Texas; and Primavera Foundation, Tucson, AZ.

Exhibit VI-2:
Service Flow and Service Delivery Sequence
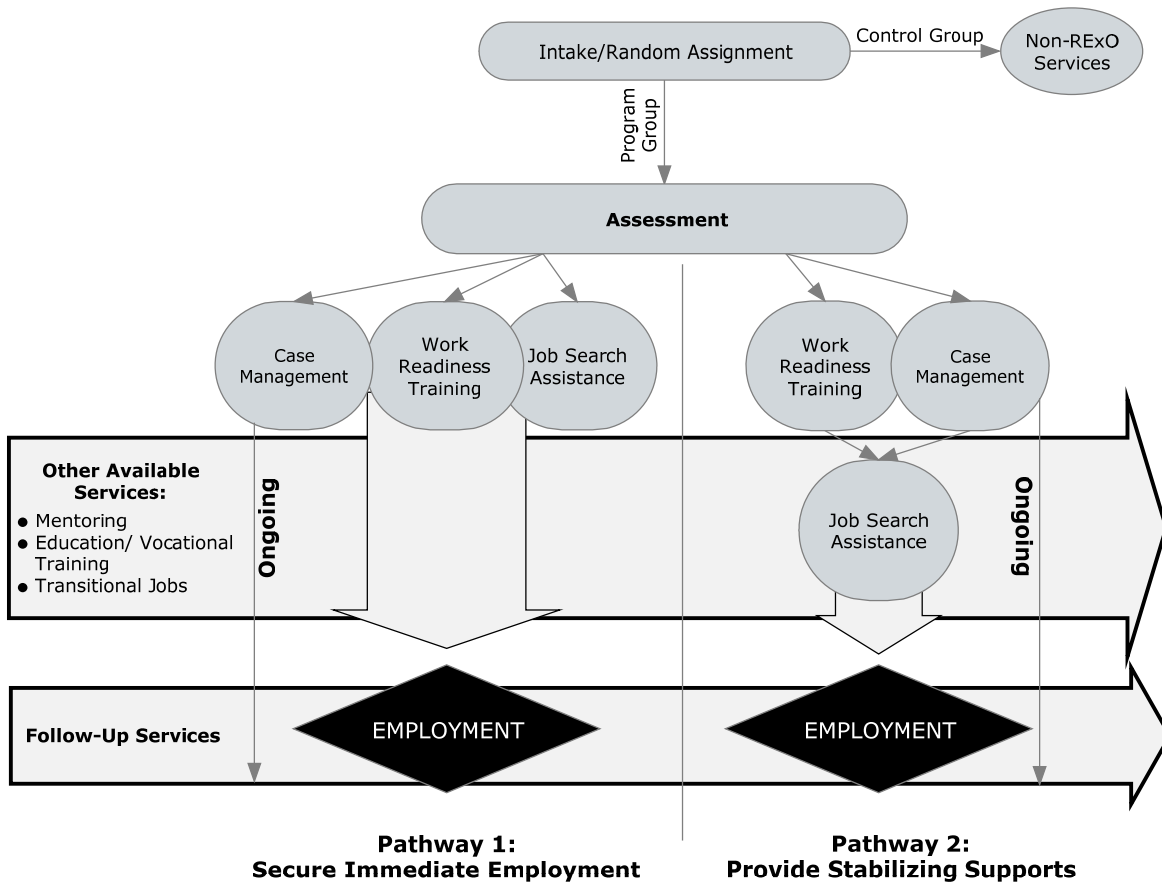
The second approach, which the study team refers to as Pathway 2: Provide Stabilizing Supports, was used by eight grantees. Under this approach, grantees prioritized case management, supportive services, and work readiness training before participants were referred for jobs. This approach ensured that participants received critical supportive services, such as housing and substance abuse treatment services, *before* they received job leads, based on the premise that without stable housing and proper substance abuse treatment, ex-offenders would not be able to obtain or retain employment. Consistent with this approach, grantees may have required that participants be "job ready" before they could get job search assistance. For example, participants at the OIC of Broward County, Inc. in Fort Lauderdale, FL, were required to complete the work readiness training before they could enter the job search phase. This training generally lasted anywhere between one to four weeks before participants began receiving job leads.

Service Use

To explore service usage by RExO participants, we analyzed data from DOL's MIS for 2,147 participants entered between February 2010 and June 2011, the period for which data is available

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on the program group. The data do not include the 650 program group members who did not have any service records.[32]

Grantees entered information about the service for which participants were referred.   The initial entry indicated the date of contact, the type of service needed, a detailed description of the service, the designated referral provider, and the expected date of completion. Grantees later used a service update screen to indicate whether the participant actually received the service, the date the participant started the service, and the date the participant last received it.[33] Because grantees entered information about each referral for a service into the MIS, each participant has multiple records for different types of services and can have more than one record for the same type of service. For example, if a participant saw a case manager in February to request a bus pass and then came back again in June for the same reason, there are two records. If that same participant came back in August and was referred to a GED class, a third record was created.

The MIS data, which were developed for program management and reporting rather than as part of the evaluation, and the resulting analysis have several limitations. First, the MIS only shows the referrals actually provided to participants, so it is not possible to estimate unmet need. Additionally, and of particular import to this chapter, the MIS does not describe case management services in enough detail to report on. While the MIS shows that a participant came in and received a referral for a service, it does not report, for example, the number of hours of case management per week and does not necessarily capture case management that occurred independent of providing a referral.[34] Given the prevalence of case management services among grantees and its centrality to program operations as reported during site visits, this lack of information in the MIS data is a major limitation of the present analysis. Finally, grantees had significant freedom to categorize services, so even case managers within the same site might not have classified a given service the same way in the MIS; for example, one case manager might have entered a transportation stipend to get to work as a supportive service, while another case manager might have considered this a workforce preparation activity. Despite these limitations,

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[32]   These records likely represent participants who enrolled in the study but never returned to receive services, potentially due to re-incarceration or relocation, because they found employment, or simply because they lost interest in the program.

[33]   This analysis does not make use of date variables because they only provide a sense of the time period in which a participant received services rather than the intensity of those services. For example, MIS data do not allow us to see the number of hours of GED instruction a participant received, only the start date and end date.

[34]   The MIS does show, for some participants, a follow-up call or visit after exit or a conversation without an apparent linked referral, but this type of contact does not appear consistently and is not categorized uniformly as any particular type of service, making systematic analysis difficult.

the MIS offers valuable insight into participants' service usage, as well as providing support for the qualitative findings from the site visits.

Case Management Services

Case managers had a central role in the RExO program because they ensured that participants gained access to the services they needed to successfully transition into the community, and provided RExO participants with emotional support, advice, encouragement, and guidance on making the right decisions. Case managers also connected participants to workforce preparation services and coordinated various supportive services dealing with housing, mental health, and substance abuse treatment, among others. In addition, case managers were responsible for developing and implementing individual service plans. At some grantee sites, they also conducted intake and assessment, coordinated mentoring services, and conducted job development activities.

Simultaneously, case managers were often tasked with building relationships with community partners in order to enhance their ability to address participants' needs. This responsibility involved identifying training programs and education providers, educating One-Stop Career Center staff members about the RExO program, and communicating with probation and parole about participants' progress. These multiple roles were reflected in the different titles that were assigned to case managers: life coach, reentry specialist, resource manager, case navigator, and wraparound specialist, to name a just a few.

Case Manager Background and Caseload

At the time of the first round of site visits (spring and summer 2010), there were 91 full-time and part-time case managers supporting RExO participants across all the grantees. This number had decreased to approximately 60 FTEs as of the second site visit. The number of case managers available at each site ranged from one to nine individuals. As displayed in Exhibit VI-3, half of the grantees had three or four designated case managers on staff; six had two or fewer; and another six had five or more.

Case managers brought a diverse range of experiences to the RExO program. Some had a background in social work and/or experience working with ex-offenders in various settings, such as homeless shelters, substance abuse treatment programs, and criminal justice organizations. For example, some of the case managers at the Church for Community Development in Baton Rouge, LA, and Spectrum Resources in Des Moines, IA, worked in the DOC providing pre-release services prior to joining the RExO program. Others, such as those at the Safer Foundation in Chicago, IL and at Metro United Methodist Church in San Diego, CA, had a long history of working in faith-based organizations in different capacities as volunteers, outreach

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coordinators, counselors, etc. In addition to hiring case managers with broad and relevant experience, grantees made a special effort to hire case managers with backgrounds similar to those of the RExO participants. Some case managers were ex-offenders and even former RExO participants themselves; participants said that working with such a case manager was very motivating to them because he or she served as a real example of someone who had succeeded in turning his or her life around.

Exhibit VI-3:
Level of Case Management Staffing

1 to 2 Case
Managers

6 grantees
25%

5 to 9 Case
Managers

6 grantees
25%

3 to 4 Case
Managers

12 grantees
50%

Note: Numbers of case managers include both full-time and part-time.
Levels of staffing as of the first round of site visits
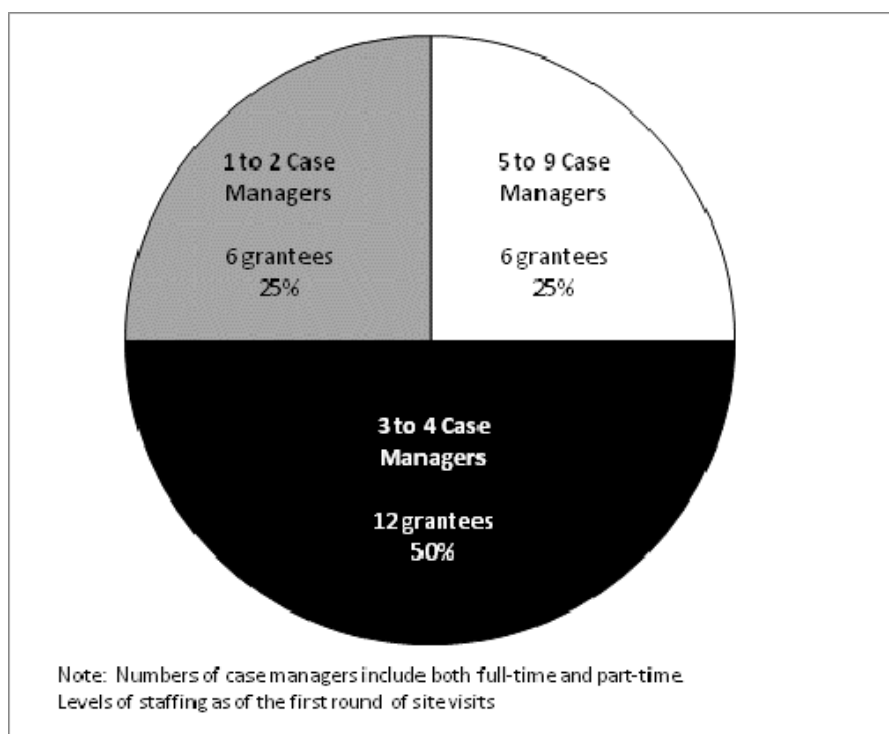
At least half of the RExO grantees faced the challenge of keeping case managers' caseloads low enough to make intensive case management support possible. As of the first site visit, caseloads varied significantly in size, from a low of fewer than 10 active[35] participants per case manager to a high of about 50 or more active participants.

Respondents noted that keeping caseloads under 30 participants per case manager was ideal, as it allowed case managers to monitor participants' progress and retention frequently, continually

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[35]   An active participant is one who has not exited or entered follow-up services.

assess their needs, and address their barriers to employment such as getting identification (ID) cards and connecting them to Food Stamps and other forms of public assistance.

Exhibit VI-4:
Average Caseload

Note: Caseloads as of the first round of site visits
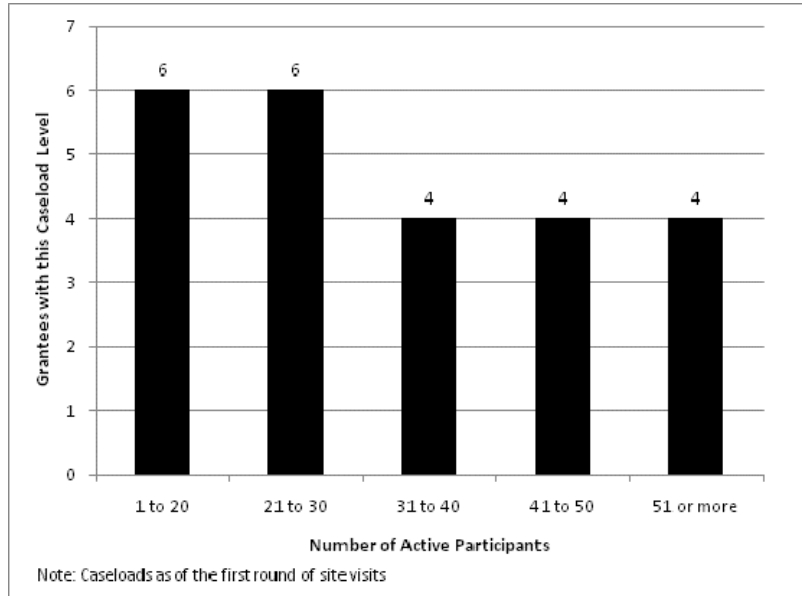
Exhibit VI-4 shows the distribution of caseloads across grantees as of the first site visit. Twelve grantees had 30 or fewer participants per case manager, while another 12 had 31 or more. By the second site visit (late 2010), case managers in at least five sites reported an increase in the number of participants on their caseloads because enrollment in their programs had increased, and because the number of case managers had declined somewhat. Such shifts could have had implications for program performance, and most case managers lamented that they could no longer provide the kind of intensive services they felt were most appropriate for this population. This trend was not universal, however, as some case managers at a few sites saw a decline in their caseloads as enrollments slowed towards the end of the grant period.

Developing Individual Development Plans

Once a participant was randomly assigned to the program group, a case manager assessed that individual to identify customer service needs, goals, and barriers to success. As discussed in Chapter IV, assessments typically involved case managers' meeting one-on-one with ex-offenders and either interviewing them or having them complete forms that detailed their living situation, family ties, educational background, current and previous work experiences, and offense history.

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A case manager used the information from the assessment to develop an Individual Development Plan (IDP) jointly with the participant. These plans served as blueprints for participants' service design, outlining short-term and long-term goals and the steps participants would take to achieve them. Case managers often shared IDPs with job developers so that they were aware of the specific goals, needs, and other circumstances that may affect a participant's job search process. The majority of the sites had IDPs in participants' case files, some of which were rich in detail with copious case management notes.

Maintaining Contact with Participants

Case managers spent a significant amount of time working with RExO participants. As discussed above, data on the specific number of hours that case managers spent with participants is not available in the MIS. However, the qualitative data suggests that case management support was an intensive activity especially when participants were "active" in the program. Within the first couple of months of enrollment, for example, case managers in all the RExO programs met with clients about once to twice per week, and then at least monthly thereafter, either by phone or in-person. In some situations, however, case managers went beyond this general schedule, meeting with clients several times per week. This more frequent meeting schedule tended to occur

> **Case File #1**
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> Matthew is in his early thirties and was released in early 2010 after his second conviction for operating a vehicle while intoxicated. Since enrolling in the RExO program, Matthew was in frequent contact with his case manager and attended many mentoring sessions. Because of his consistent participation, he received 12 gift card incentives. He worked with the job developer to develop his résumé and job search skills. Although Matthew had not yet obtained employment at the time of the visit, he registered at the local community college, where the grantee covered his first semester's tuition, books, and supplies. He continued to attend school and look for jobs and was leading a stable life.

when clients were actively seeking employment or when they had particular challenges. One participant, for instance, met several times a week with his case manager because he was worried about making his child support payments. He also faced a transportation challenge because his driver's license had been recently revoked. The case manager helped him to reduce the interest on his child support payment to lessen the financial burden, and worked with him in an effort to get his license back; she also offered bus tokens to help the participant get to meetings and job interviews. Another example of frequent contacts with case managers is shown in Case File #1.

Case managers said that maintaining frequent contact was a key strategy for building trust with the participants because many ex-offenders had lost trust in the community and the institutions on which they now needed to rely. As a result, case managers made a special effort to stay connected with program participants, calling them when they did not show up for appointments and even visiting their homes to check up on them. At Metro United Methodist Urban Ministries

in San Diego, CA, for instance, case managers spoke about calling participants to track them down if they did not show up for scheduled appointments. Participants at this site said that even if they did not meet with their case managers in person, the case managers were looking for ways to help them, by calling service providers on their behalf and making appointments for them. In some cases, a number of case managers gave out their cell phone numbers so that participants could call them any time, even at night.

Maintaining regular contact with participants was challenging, despite the case managers' best efforts to build trust. Case managers said that clients sometimes "disappeared" from the program without notice and did not return calls or e-mails. When this happened, case managers predicted that in the best-case scenario, participants found employment or, in the worst-case scenario, they recidivated. One participant, for example, was classified as "on the run" by his case manager because she was unable to locate him after multiple attempts. According to the case manager, the participant was required to attend a substance abuse treatment program as part of his service plan, but was overwhelmed by this responsibility and decided to cease contact with the program.

Sometimes, however, case managers were unable to maintain frequent contact with clients for reasons that had to do with the way their RExO program operated. In at least seven sites, case managers had difficulty maintaining contact because they had too many responsibilities beyond their case management functions. At one site, for instance, the case managers were also responsible for job development and job placement. In other sites, case managers had high caseloads, with more than 50 active participants at one time, making it difficult to maintain frequent contact with individual participants and provide individualized support. Finally, many of the grantees seemed to have fairly informal processes for checking up on customers with whom they had little contact, meaning that some participants could "fall through the cracks."

Connecting Participants to Supportive Services

RExO participants required a host of supportive services to address their substantial barriers to employment, such as their needs for housing; transportation; substance abuse treatment; mental health services; medical and dental care; childcare; fees for things like obtaining an identification card or a driver's license; legal assistance around tasks such as expunging a record; food, clothing and other basic staples; and materials and supplies for training and education courses. Housing, transportation, and substance abuse services were the most common supportive services provided and were made available in-house or through referrals to other organizations. Data from the MIS—as shown in Exhibit VI-5—show that more than half of the participants used supportive services between February 2010 and June 2011 (58.5%). Transportation was the most common supportive service received, followed by other supportive services and health services.

Exhibit VI-5:
Supportive Service Usage
(February 2010 to June 2011)

	#of Program Participants Using Service	% of Program Participants Using Service
	1257	58.5%
Transportation	866	40.3%
Other Supportive Services[1]	754	35.1%
Health Services[2]	226	10.5%
Needs-Related Payments[3]	92	4.3%
Childcare Services	1	0.0%

[1] Examples include: housing assistance, assistance paying for work clothing, renewing driver's license, and referrals to food banks, or parenting classes.
[2] Health services include substance abuse counseling and treatment and referrals for medical service needs.
[3] Needs-related Payments include incentive payments and financial assistance to participants for the purpose of enabling individuals to participate in training.
Source: DOL RExO MIS data

Securing stable housing was considered one of the most critical needs for ex-offenders, according to RExO staff members. Staff members noted that, without stable housing, ex-offenders were likely to become homeless and fall back into their former lifestyles. One program staff member illustrated this point by stating, "If you don't provide housing, don't bother, because how in the world will you get your life back on track with no housing?" Because housing resources were in short supply, case managers referred participants to local shelters or transitional housing facilities, though the long waiting lists and/or prohibitive expense sometimes made it difficult for participants to secure housing at these facilities. On the other hand, a few grantees were able to pay for some type of housing or to provide rental assistance by leveraging other resources within their parent organizations. Some examples include the following:

- Episcopal Community Services in Baltimore paid for 10 weeks of transitional housing assistance, made possible through a $40,000 annual housing grant from the Able Foundation.

- Community Partners in Action in Hartford assisted clients with a rental deposit and provided gift cards for other necessities, made possible through a grant.

- POCAAN in Seattle offered $450 of rental assistance, plus a $25 voucher for food every month for up to 12 months, through its Get Off the Streets (GOTS) program, which is funded by the City of Seattle. RExO participants can co-enroll in the GOTS program to access rental assistance.

- Spectrum Resources in Des Moines received a $15,000 grant from the Greater Des Moines Foundation and used it partly to pay for ex-offenders' temporary housing immediately after their release from prison.

Other housing options for RExO participants included community-based correctional housing facilities and transitional housing, which offered temporary housing while ex-offenders were under supervision. Respondents noted that these options were severely limited, and when they were available many of them required rental payments that typically averaged about $13 per day. One exception was a transitional housing facility in Phoenix called TLC, which housed individuals free of charge with the stipulation that clients get a job within a set timeframe. If ex-offenders were unable to find employment, they were required to participate in the program's day laborer program, which paid for the bulk of their housing.

Transportation assistance was another common type of supportive service that RExO programs provided. Case managers gave bus tokens to participants to help them travel to service locations, job interviews, and worksites. Some case managers, such as those at the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency in Pontiac, MI, used bus tokens as incentives for program participation, such as attending a work readiness class or showing up at meetings with case managers or mentors. At least three sites, such as the Connections to Success program in Kansas City and the Step Out Program at the Church United for Community Development in Baton Rouge had a van service that transported participants to various locations, including job interviews and other appointments.

Another common support service need was for substance abuse treatment, including inpatient and outpatient treatment. Since grantees had limited capacity to provide these services on their own, they relied on a network of providers to which participants could be referred. Referrals usually involved connecting participants to providers in the community with whom the grantee had little or no formal relationship, or to providers with whom the grantee had a formal agreement through an MOU or subcontract. In most cases, case managers referred participants to the former, giving participants information about the specific

> **Case File #2**
>
> Elizabeth is in her mid-fifties and was released in 2010 after serving nine months in a state prison for burglary and check fraud. She had a history of employment in construction and sewing and alterations. When she entered the RExO program, she needed substance abuse treatment and medical care, in addition to help finding permanent employment. She was very proactive about staying in touch with her RExO case manager and job developer. After enrolling in a drug relapse prevention program and attending work readiness training, Elizabeth obtained full-time employment doing magazine sales, earning approximately $8 per hour. She continues to work and attend her substance abuse classes.

services available in the community, such as the location of the facility and the type of services available. Case managers often made appointments for participants and called the facility to see if clients showed up and received services. In one site, where coordination with partners was particularly strong, case managers stayed in touch with the providers on a regular basis to

monitor their clients' progress. Case File #2 shows an example of a participant who successfully completed a treatment program.

On the other hand, in sites where partnerships with providers were not well developed, clients often did not receive treatment in a timely manner unless case managers advocated on their behalf. One grantee, for example, had a long list of substance abuse providers to which participants were referred, but all of the providers were full to capacity, so it was very difficult for RExO participants to receive these services.

When grantees had strong ties to specific providers, participants' chances of receiving services were greater. One participant with a long history of drug abuse relapsed due to a death in the family. The case manager arranged substance abuse treatment at an in-patient facility that has a long history of collaboration with the RExO program, and the client successfully completed the program. Goodwill in San Antonio, TX, has a strong partnership with a substance abuse provider, the Center for Health Care Services (CHCS). Under this partnership, Goodwill referred RExO participants for treatment and, in return, CHCS referred its clients to Goodwill for employment services.

Approximately eight RExO programs had the capacity to offer treatment services in-house, through the parent organization. The types of services naturally varied among these organizations, ranging from support groups that were facilitated by licensed therapists to outpatient treatment programs. Span, Inc. in Boston, MA, for instance, provided outpatient substance abuse treatment for ex-offenders especially targeting those living with HIV/AIDS. OIC of Broward County, FL, had a substance abuse unit with a full team of licensed professionals to provide in-house treatment, thanks to a recent grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The Jericho Program at the Episcopal Community Services of Maryland in Baltimore partnered with a licensed clinical therapist who visited the program once a week to conduct group therapy and met with individual clients to counsel them on day-to-day challenges such as their difficulties staying off drugs. A psychiatrist also visited the program once a month to prescribe needed medication.

The areas on which the supportive services discussed above were focused—housing, transportation, substance abuse—were identified as the most immediate challenges facing RExO participants. Respondents noted that providing the services that addressed these needs was a key strategy to removing barriers to employment and promoting success in the RExO program. While case managers had systems in place to provide these services in-house or through referrals, these services—such as housing and substance abuse treatment—were limited in scope due to a scarcity of community resources. The few grantees that were able to leverage resources from other funders reported being better able to successfully connect participants to essential

services such as housing and substance abuse treatment, two services for which RExO grantees could not spend their own funds.

Providing Incentives

In most programs, participants received a host of incentives to promote program participation and job retention. These incentives included cash payments, gift cards, bus tokens, food, and prizes such as t-shirts. In order to receive incentives, participants were required to meet key milestones, such as completing work readiness training, showing up at meetings with case managers, getting a job, and retaining a job for a certain period of time. According to the MIS data in Exhibit VI-5, a small percentage of participants received needs-related payments or incentive payments (4.3 percent). The small percentage may in part be due to the fact that programs were near the end of the DOL contract and needed to reduce their costs.

Incentives differed for "active" participants and for those in "follow-up" status. Active participants received incentives for attending job clubs, mentoring meetings, workshops on work readiness, life skills trainings, and other activities. For example, participants at New Choice Program within MAAP in Sacramento earned cash bonuses ranging from $50 to $100 for attending meetings with case managers and mentors, registering for jobs online, and turning in a job search worksheet. Participants in follow-up status received incentives for remaining employed in their current jobs if they brought in their most recent pay stubs as proof of employment. At the Safer Foundation in Chicago participants who remained employed for 180 days received a $100 cash bonus. Other grantees offered bus tokens if participants remained employed.

Respondents noted that the incentive payments were critical for helping participants pay for their basic needs such as housing, food, and personal items. Participants also reported that the incentives helped to motivate them to continue to pursue their goals while in the RExO program. However, many grantees had reduced their incentives by the second site visits due to the decrease in program funding for the fifth year of operations. This meant that the amounts of cash incentives were smaller than previously and the policies for receiving incentives were noticeably more stringent. For example, incentives decreased at Community Partners in Action in Hartford, CT, from the first to second round of site visits. During the first round of visits, the program offered gift cards that ranged in value from $25 to $75 for participation in program activities such as anger management workshops, substance abuse education classes, etc. These incentives were not available during the second site visit because, according to staff members, there was no money left in the budget for them. Anecdotally, staff felt this had an effect of the efficacy of the program; the impact analysis will examine whether incentives were associated with improved outcomes for participants.

Employment Services

Another set of core services available to RExO participants was employment services, which are defined as services that help participants obtain and retain employment. These services fall into four distinct categories: (1) work readiness training and soft skills development; (2) placement in transitional jobs or trial employment; (3) job search assistance, job placement, and job development; and (4) education and vocational training.

Work Readiness Training

Work readiness training sought to build soft skills and prepare participants for job search and employment. The training typically covered résumé-building, interviewing skills, appropriate dress, punctuality, and job search strategies. Additional topics included career exploration, financial literacy, basic computer skills, family and relationships, substance abuse prevention, life skills (e.g., anger management and conflict resolution), and health education (e.g., HIV/AIDS prevention). In addition, participants learned how best to deal with employers' questions about criminal history on job applications and during interviews. The New Choice program in Sacramento, for instance, required that participants prepare a "letter of explanation" as part of their work readiness training, so that they had written notes to guide them on how to explain their criminal background to employers. Case file #3 describes one participant's experience in work readiness training.

In addition to the mechanics of learning how to search for work and prepare themselves for job interviews, participants were coached on how to shift their mindsets so that they were ready to make positive changes in their lives. This involved a deep level of coaching, through one-on-one meetings and group discussions, in which case managers and job developers talked to participants about how to succeed without relying on criminal activity. For instance, staff members worked with participants to examine how their decisions and perspectives affected their actions, how their actions had consequences, and how those consequences affected their lives. In doing so, staff members helped them think about how to change their behavior so that they could stay out of prison and lead healthy lives.

> **Case File #3**
>
> Jonathan is in his mid-twenties and was incarcerated for driving under the influence and evading arrest. Upon entering RExO services in mid-2010, he attended all of the offered workshops on résumé writing, computer skills, and other work readiness topics. He also enrolled at the local community college to take the classes needed to obtain his high school diploma. In addition, the RExO program funded Jonathan to get his forklift-operating certificate. Jonathan regularly stopped by the RExO office to check in with his case manager and discuss job leads with the job developer. He soon found full-time employment with a plate glass company and continued to attend school after work in order to receive his high school diploma.

RExO programs made an effort to mix up the training format so that participants stayed engaged and remained interested in the program. They did this by offering a combination of traditional classroom training, role-playing, small- and large-group activities, and computer-based learning. For instance, the work readiness training at Community Partners in Action in Hartford comprised both computer-based and in-person exercises. The program used training software that consisted of five modules on employability skills and six self-paced modules on financial literacy that participants could work on at their own pace. Once the participants completed these modules, they participated in a mock interview with a program staff member, who provided feedback on their performance.

Twenty grantees—the vast majority—required participants to complete at least some aspect of work readiness training, such as résumé development or interviewing skills. Requiring participation in this training ensured that participants got the basic support they needed to be "job ready." Some grantees were flexible, however, as they allowed participants to bypass this requirement if they had already attended a similar training in prison.

Two grantees of those offering work readiness training did not explicitly require participants to attend but strongly recommended that they did. Participants at these two sites received self-paced training modules that were flexibly designed to be tailored to individuals' skills and needs. Grantee staff members at these two sites noted that while the training was not required, most participants attended it anyway.

Exhibit VI-6:
Participation in Work Readiness Training
(February 2010 to June 2011)

	#of Program Participants Using Service	% of Program Participants Using Service
	1767	82.3%
Workforce Information Services[1]	1,215	56.6%
Work Readiness Training	938	43.7%
Other Workforce Preparation Activities[2]	810	37.7%
Career/Life Skills Training	563	26.2%

[1] Workforce information services include information about the local and state labor market conditions, industry and occupational projections, high growth and high demand industries, etc.

[2] Other workforce preparation activities include: referrals to staffing agencies, résumé updating, mock interviews, job clubs, job search assistance, etc.

Source: DOL RExO MIS data

Consistent with the qualitative data, the MIS data show that the majority of participants (82.3%) enrolled in work readiness training, and more than half of them received "workforce information services" or labor market information. The MIS data show that a small percentage of

participants received career/life skills training (26.2%) in relation to other services in this category.

In the 20 sites in which it was offered, work readiness training usually occurred immediately after enrollment into the program. As discussed above, in about 16 sites, this training occurred at the same time that participants were given job search assistance, while the other grantees required that participants complete work readiness training before they entered the job search phase (that is, before they were referred for jobs).

The duration of work readiness training varied widely, as shown in Exhibit VI-7.

Exhibit VI-7:
Duration of Work Readiness Training

Duration	Grantees Offering Training of this Length
More than 24 hours	4
12–23 hours	11
Fewer than 12 hours	8
Does not offer	2

Note: At one site, the duration of work readiness training varied by individual sub-grantees, as each offered its own training. Thus, the total number in this table adds up to more than 24 grantees.

As shown in the exhibit, the duration of work readiness training ranged from fewer than 12 hours to more than 24 hours. Eleven grantees developed work readiness curricula that took between 12-23 hours to complete. Grantees offered these programs most often in the course of a week, with classes lasting between two and six hours per day. Four grantees offered very intensive work readiness training programs, lasting more than 24 hours total and occurring over a period of two weeks to one month. Eight grantees offered work readiness training that lasted less than 12 hours and took one or a few days to complete.

Grantees also differed in how they delivered work readiness training. The majority of the grantees (19) provided this training in-house, using their own staff members to develop the curriculum and deliver the training. Respondents noted that offering the training in-house was beneficial because staff members facilitating the training were familiar with the other RExO services available and could coordinate the training closely with the participants' case managers.

Three grantees subcontracted with local providers to deliver work readiness training because they did not have the staff capacity to offer it themselves. These grantees also subcontracted out this training because they sought providers with deeper knowledge and experience in delivering work readiness training. This was why Span, Inc. in Boston subcontracted with The Work Place,

the local One-Stop Career Center, to provide a weeklong work readiness training program. Similarly, Talbert House in Cincinnati and Community Partners in Action in Hartford contracted with the Urban League in their communities to provide work readiness training to RExO participants.

Transitional Jobs/Trial Employment

Seven grantees offered transitional jobs or trial employment that provided opportunities for earning immediate income, gaining hands-on work experience, and building work-related soft skills.[36] A total of 128 participants (six percent) received this service between February 2010 and June 2011. In general, the work itself is intended to give participants a chance to build relevant work history and to practice good work behavior in preparation for permanent positions. In fact, five grantees explicitly stated that they placed RExO participants with employers without the expectation that they would be hired at the completion of the work assignment. Transitional jobs usually began after participants completed their work readiness training. Participants usually worked for short periods of time (one to three months) and earned the minimum wage.[37]

Of the grantees providing transitional jobs, four placed participants in positions within the RExO agency, three placed them with local employers or other organizations, and one offered both options.

As shown in Exhibit VI-8, there were many different types of positions available through transitional jobs, such as those in retail, food service, construction, and manufacturing.

Although most transitional jobs did not provide structured training, a few RExO programs' partners offered some form of hands-on training. For example, the supervisor at the auto parts plant that partnered with OLHSA in Pontiac, MI helped participants develop their soft skills. He taught them how to ask for time off for personal appointments, rather than simply not show up for work. Similarly, Episcopal Community Services of Maryland partnered with an organization that provided a pre-apprenticeship in the construction trades, during which participants received occupational skills, soft skills, and basic skills training.

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[36] The term *transitional jobs or trial employment* refers to subsidized employment. Grantees use many different terms to describe this activity, such as on-the-job training (OJT), pre-apprenticeship or apprenticeship programs, or simply subsidized employment.

[37] One impact study on transitional jobs for ex-offenders in Indianapolis suggests that the opportunity for ex-offenders to secure immediate employment upon release from incarceration can positively impact relationships with family, management of child support obligations, and recidivism. See "Impact on Transitional Jobs: A Study of Ex-Offenders in Indianapolis." http://www.sagamoreinstitute.org/mediafiles/impact-of-transitional-jobs.pdf. Downloaded on April 25, 2011.

SPR

The interactions between program participants and program staff members were very frequent while participants were working in transitional jobs. Case managers and job developers often visited worksites to monitor participants' progress and checked in with worksite supervisors to get feedback on the participants' work quality.

Exhibit VI-8:
Summary of Transitional Jobs/Trial Employment

Fresno Career Development Institute, Fresno, CA	Employers hired a RExO participant for a trial period of one–to-two weeks, while CDI funded the participant's salary. If successful, the participant stayed in the position for approximately 30 more days. During this time, CDI continued to fund the salary but the participant filed a timesheet with the employer. At the end of the 30 days, the employer decided whether or not to hire the participant permanently.
Goodwill Industries, San Antonio, TX	Goodwill placed all RExO participants in its thrift stores for 90 days, working 32 hours a week at $7.25 an hour. After 90 days, participants were no longer allowed to work in transitional jobs. They were required look for other work.
OLHSA, Pontiac, MI	The grantee had a contract with an auto parts manufacturer to place participants in transitional jobs/trial employment. The employer offered hands-on, vocational training in manufacturing and work readiness training. The employer could then hire participants if they did well on the job.
St. Patrick Center, St. Louis, MO	The grantee owned a restaurant that employed participants for 12 weeks and trained them in all aspects of the restaurant business and food service industry.
Episcopal Community Services of Maryland, Baltimore, MD	This grantee had an agreement with JumpStart, a program that was part of the Baltimore Job Opportunities Task Force. RExO participants could participate in a 13-week pre-apprenticeship program available through JumpStart, which provided on-the-job training in construction trades such as plumbing, electric, and carpentry. Participants received stipends for the duration of the program and were placed in construction jobs upon graduation. If they excelled in their placements, they entered a formal apprenticeship program.
MAAP, Sacramento, CA	The grantee developed contracts with employers stating that it would fund half of the participants' salary for the first two weeks of employment. If participants were successful during these first two weeks, the grantee would possibly pay for an additional 90 days. At the end of 90 days, the employer often hired the participant full-time.
POCAAN, Seattle, WA	The grantee offered a number of trial employment opportunities that paid $10 per hour. These positions were available in-house at the grantee office for several months. The positions included landscaping, janitorial, and general office work. The grantee also created trial employment positions at selected local businesses for two weeks so that participants had an opportunity to work with an employer that may have had open positions.

Job Development, Job Search, and Job Placement

Once case managers and job developers deemed participants as "job ready," they began the job search process with a job developer or employment services staff member. The majority of

grantees hired specific staff members to be responsible for job search assistance and job placement. In some cases, case managers were also involved with job development.

Developing Jobs for Ex-Offenders

Many employers are reluctant to hire ex-offenders in general (Pager, 2003; Holzer, et al., 2003). As is discussed in greater detail in Chapter II, grantee staff members noted that the national recession made it more difficult than ever to partner with employers. Respondents indicated that many businesses scaled back their hiring efforts or laid off staff and as a result were unable to hire anyone. If they hired at all, those hires tended not to be ex-offenders. Given this challenge, grantees used a variety of strategies to engage employers in hiring ex-offenders from their RExO programs:

- **Grantees educated employers about the benefits of tax credits and Federal bonds to encourage them to hire ex-offenders**. Grantees noted that many employers were unaware that these incentives were available and grantee staff discovered that some employers were more willing to hire ex-offenders after learning about them.

- **Grantee staff members informed employers about the services available to them if they hired ex-offenders.** These services included applicant screening and referrals. Staff members also emphasized that they frequently checked in on participants at the worksite to see how participants were doing, and mediated any conflicts at the worksite. Grantees also assured employers that they would help them find another employee if their initial placement was unsuccessful.

- **Grantee staff members built on existing employer relationships**. Many RExO programs had a long history of working with local employers and tried to nurture these relationships by continuing to "sell" the RExO program. One way program staff members sold the program was "to pull at employers' heartstrings," especially in communities where employers may have friends or family that had been incarcerated, and this was described as a particularly effective approach. Another tactic was to frame employing ex-offenders as a public safety issue; staff members emphasized that if an ex-offender had stable employment, he or she was less likely to recidivate or commit a crime.

- **Grantee staff members targeted the employers most likely to hire ex-offenders.** Several grantees reported that they specifically targeted employers that hired ex-offenders, using a database that they created, listing employers who had previously hired their participants. Several others targeted businesses in specific sectors that were known to be friendly to ex-offenders, such as construction, food distribution, and sanitation, among others. One job developer did extensive employer outreach, having recently convened a business focus group made up of eight employers from eight different sectors to learn about opportunities for ex-offenders.

Job developers also identified leads by cold-calling employers, searching Web sites and newspapers, contacting business associations or groups, and conducting ongoing marketing

throughout the community. Grantees also relied on temporary staffing agencies to identify job leads. Below is one example.

Sector Managers at the Safer Foundation (Chicago)

At the Safer Foundation in Chicago, "sector managers" were responsible for job development and traveled all over the city to visit employers. Each sector manager was responsible for job development in a certain area of the city. A key element of a sector manager's role was to connect participants with "job orders" from employers. When issuing a job order, employers informed their designated sector manager of the number of positions available, the pay, the skills required, the offenses that were eligible, and the proximity to public transport so that the sector manager could identify appropriate potential candidates. Before sending candidates to interviews, sector managers held "pre-screens" in which they interviewed and assessed which participants to send. At this stage, the sector managers may have referred participants whom they deemed not job-ready back to their case managers for further preparation. Sector managers then prepared potential candidates for interviews with employers. By using this intensive screening process, sector managers ensured that participants were not set up for failure and that employers felt confident about the candidates they received from the Safer Foundation.

The strategies described above suggest that grantees were considering new ways of engaging employers. Many grantees faced a number of challenges, however, as they sought to develop relationships with employers. First, grantees did not make strong use of labor market information to guide their job development efforts. Often, that information was not particularly relevant because participants' options for employment were so constrained by their criminal records. For example, healthcare is a growth industry in a number of cities but the number of healthcare occupations open to ex-offenders is very small.

Another common challenge was limited employer outreach. This is not surprising, as some job developers lack strong marketing skills to identify opportunities for ex-offenders and the employers that were willing to hire them.[38] This challenge was exacerbated somewhat by the fact that, in a number of sites, the job development function was often not sufficiently staffed. In at least eight sites, the job development was assumed by case managers who did not have sufficient time and expertise to conduct job development.

Lastly, some job developers who sought to engage with employers through affiliate organizations or associations—chambers of commerce, industry associations, sector organizations, and regional or neighborhood business alliances—were not successful because of the concerns that employers had about hiring ex-offenders. These concerns, such as fear for

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[38] Often, those who served as job developers for RExO grantees had relatively little training or background as a job developer or in labor markets, specifically. Typically, the job developer was a former offender who had successfully found employment and sought to assist others in a similar position.

public safety while on the job and limited work histories among the ex-offenders, posed challenges for job developers seeking to place participants in jobs. One job developer explained this fact: "They [employers] don't seem to understand that if we keep locking people up, and then give them no employment options when they come out, the first thing that will go up is crime."

Assisting with Job Search and Job Placement

In addition to working directly with employers, job developers also interacted with participants. One of the first steps in the job search and job placement process was a meeting between the participant and the job developer. During these meetings, the job developer assessed the participant's skills, career interests, and work experience. Based on this assessment, the job developer provided the participant with career guidance and job leads that matched his or her background. Job developers also helped clients identify transferable skills or interests that could broaden their job search and give them new employment possibilities. Job developers continued working with participants to identify new job leads and coached them along the way until the participants secured employment. Case file #3 shows the kinds of support one participant needed to find employment.

Staff members also expected RExO participants to search independently for jobs, using the skills and knowledge that they learned during the work readiness training. They encouraged participants to use on-site computers to look for jobs online, and referred them to the local One-Stop Career Centers for additional job leads. Some programs also set goals and benchmarks for participants to encourage continual progress. For example, at Episcopal Community Services of Maryland, staff members expected participants to contact three employers each day, every day, in addition to working with job developers to look for employment.

If a participant was offered an interview with an employer, program staff members helped that person prepare by reviewing tips on how to dress appropriately, shake hands, sell oneself, talk about one's skills, and discuss one's criminal background. Program staff members also provided interview-appropriate clothing or assisted with transportation to the interview site.

In addition to ongoing job search assistance, at least six grantees offered job clubs. These were regular, often weekly meetings facilitated by program staff members in which participants shared job leads and offered support to each other as they went through the job search process. These groups gave participants the opportunity to network with one another, share lessons learned, and receive extra support from program staff. At some other sites, job clubs took on a form similar to work readiness training, in which program staff members helped clients to continue to build skills by helping them with their résumés and online applications and conducting mock interviews. Job clubs provided safe spaces for participants, as programs often provided food and drinks and a warm and welcoming space to encourage peer sharing. In a few sites, participants

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were expected to bring their job search notebooks and to write down what they were learning from their peers.

Grantees also had different expectations for how frequently and intensively staff members contacted clients during the job search phase. At Goodwill Industries in San Antonio, employment specialists had weekly meetings with clients, whereas at the St. Patrick Center in St. Louis, staff members met with clients only as needed. At OLHSA in Pontiac, MI, employment specialists followed up with clients after three weeks of independent job search. Grantees also required that participants check in with program staff members while they were looking for work as a way of keeping them on track. At Connection Training Services in Philadelphia, participants checked in at the office in the morning and then went out into the city for several hours looking for job openings. They returned to the office in the afternoon and reported on their progress.

Education and Vocational Training

Education and vocational training services were not central to the RExO program's service package, as most grantees focused on placing participants in employment in a relatively short time frame. Participants themselves often did not want to take the time to embark on a training program, especially one that did not provide compensation of some kind (as transitional employment or on-the-job training does) because they needed income as soon as possible to secure housing.

Despite these factors, all of the RExO programs made educational opportunities and vocational training available to participants, primarily through external partners. Of the opportunities available, the most commonly utilized training was GED instruction. A GED was a prerequisite for many jobs and was the appropriate next level of educational attainment for most of the members of this population. Approximately 17 grantees reported that they referred participants to community colleges or other community organizations for these courses. Two grantees reported having these classes available in-house. Program staff members noted that many participants who were referred for GED classes did not attend them or dropped out before completion.

Grantees also provided opportunities for participants to enroll in vocational training. These programs varied in scope; most commonly, grantees referred participants to short programs focused on upgrading or learning specific skill sets. The areas of training include Occupational Health and Safety Administration regulations, forklift operation, hazardous materials handling, landscaping, commercial trucking, and Microsoft Office training or certification. These trainings usually lasted from a few days to a few weeks. Grantees used the RExO grant to fund the training but a few grantees were able to leverage resources from their partners to offset this cost.

These findings are consistent with what grantees reported in the MIS, which shows that 387 participants (18%) received some form of education and vocational training.

Exhibit VI-9:
Participation in Education and Vocational Training

	Number of Program Participants Using Service	Percent of Program Participants Using Service
	387	18.0%
Other Education or Job Training*	308	14.3%
Vocational/Occupational Skills Training	94	4.4%
GED Preparation	24	1.1%
Math/Reading Remediation	2	0.1%

*Other education or job training includes computer classes, job skills class, Bible study, employability class, etc.
Source: DOL RExO MIS data

Follow-Up Services

Follow-up services included staff members' efforts to (1) maintain contact with participants after they obtained employment or exited from the program and (2) provide ongoing case management or supportive services. Follow-up contact and support were the primary responsibility of the case managers, though job developers also contacted participants as needed. As with WIA-funded programs, customers exited from the program after they had not received a service for 90 days, and no future service was planned. They could however, continue to receive services after entering employment.

Once participants were in "follow-up" status—which occurred once they had exited the program—case managers attempted contact in order to check on their employment status and personal well-being. As mentioned above, clients were offered a variety of incentives for bringing in a pay stub so that the case managers could document the clients' employment status. Case managers contacted clients anywhere from once a week to once a quarter, though some case managers did not have any type of schedule. Others followed a very structured approach to conducting follow-up, contacting participants 30, 60, 90, and 180 days after employment. Different modes of communication were used to reach participants, such as e-mail, text messaging, face-to-face visits, and telephone calls.

Another goal of follow-up services was to provide additional services if participants lost their jobs or struggled with personal challenges that might affect their employment, such as a relapse

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in drug use. For example, one participant was hired as an administrative assistant in a financial company where she worked for six weeks before she was terminated. She returned to the RExO program to get help looking for work and to access supportive services. Because she had no income to pay rent, the RExO program helped secure $200 to help cover her rent until she could find another job. After working closely with the job developer, she quickly found a job at a local bakery.

Providing intensive follow-up services was a common practice at a number of sites, where participants were encouraged to meet with case managers and mentors after exiting the program. Data from the MIS show that approximately 586 participants (27.3%) received some form of follow-up support between February 2010 to June 2011. Some of the specific services that participants received included incentive payments at key milestones, case management support, and referrals to community services, among others. For example, at the New Choice Program in Sacramento, follow-up services were offered for a full nine months after participants obtained employment. During this period, participants were required to meet with case managers once per month, talk to them on the phone every other week, and attend at least two mentoring meetings per month. This intensive follow-up support ensured that clients continued to stay focused on their employment goals during what the program staff members believed was a vulnerable transition period.

The success of follow-up services was challenged primarily by the highly transient nature of many ex-offenders; often their phone numbers were disconnected or they simply failed to return staff members' calls. Even though grantees provided financial incentives to improve follow-up connections, it was difficult to get former participants to contact case managers or to physically return to the RExO program site to let case managers know of their status. Grantees developed a range of creative strategies to overcome these challenges. They contacted probation, parole, or employers, or canvassed local neighborhoods. To increase its chances of locating participants, one RExO program asked clients during intake to include a phone number of "the person you would call if you needed bail money." They then used that number to try to track down participants. Overall, the case managers' ability to reach participants seemed to depend somewhat on the strength of the case manager–participant relationship, and the extent to which participants were really in need of support and services.

Mentoring

RExO grantees provided mentoring services to help ex-offenders develop positive relationships so that they could better reintegrate into society. Programs offered a mix of individual and group mentoring activities as well as other services that grantees described as mentoring, such as hosting guest speakers and conducting workshops. The most intensive mentoring activities were

those that required participation and connected participants one-on-one with community volunteers. Less intensive mentoring services were those that were informal, unstructured, and optional. Approximately 10 grantees required participation in some type of mentoring activity. The remaining 14 grantees offered mentoring activities but did not require that participants take part. Approximately 1,341 participants (62.5 percent) received mentoring services of some kind between February 2010 to June 2011.

This section describes the use of individual and group methods, the service delivery arrangement, and the process for recruiting mentors, training them, and matching them with program participants.

Types of Mentoring

The RExO grantees made use of both individual mentoring and group mentoring. Some grantees employed only one of these types, but the majority offered both.

Individual Mentoring

Grantees that offered individual mentoring used two different methods to deliver it: (1) community volunteers were paired with participants, usually on a one-to-one basis, or (2) a single mentor (either a staff person or a volunteer) provided mentoring for all participants in the program (e.g., one mentor to up to 50 participants). Fifteen grantees used the first method, and three used the second. The remaining grantees did not offer individual mentoring.

Among the 15 grantees that connected participants with community volunteers to work one-on-one with participants, the mentor was responsible for a caseload of one to several mentees, meeting with them regularly to help them navigate and adapt to life outside of prison. At least four grantees paired a mentor with more than one mentee, most often because of a shortage of volunteer mentors. One grantee paired two to three mentors with a single mentee to prevent mentor burnout. Mentors were required to contact their mentees on a regular basis, most often once a week or twice monthly, in person or by phone, to ensure they were receiving the support they needed and to help them address any barriers—logistical or emotional—that they may have been facing. Mentors also checked in with program staff members to let them know how the mentees were doing. Activities mentors and mentees did together included eating a meal or attending a church service or program event. Mentors also sometimes drove them to appointments, appeared with them in court, or attended social events with them.

A small number of grantees (three) relied on a community volunteer or a designated staff member to provide mentoring to all the participants in the program. Under this approach, the mentor was usually responsible for approximately 20 to 50 mentees. The mentor was often responsible for helping the participants set goals, connecting them to community services, and staying in regular contact with them. The Odyssey House in New Orleans provided a good

example of this individual mentoring method. The organization hired a full-time designated mentor whose sole responsibility was to "mentor" participants. This mentor met individually with participants and helped them develop an "improvement plan" with both long- and short-term goals. In order to stay in contact with participants, he spent his days driving around New Orleans, meeting with them wherever was convenient for them. This approach to mentoring resembled case management, and significantly augments the support that participants received.

Group Mentoring

The second type of mentoring that RExO grantees provided was group mentoring, which encompassed a wide variety of activities from on-site group events to off-site social events. Almost all grantees (23) provided some kind of group mentoring activity. As shown in Exhibit VI-10, three major types of activities were considered group mentoring: (1) support groups; (2) group events; and (3) supplemental work readiness and life skills workshops.

Exhibit VI-10:
Group Mentoring Activities

Activity	Grantees Offering this Type of Activity
Support Groups	16
Group Events	7
Group Workshops	9

Note: Grantees usually offered more than one type of group mentoring activity.

Support Groups. Sixteen grantees offered support groups as a form of mentoring, because they believed that peer support was a powerful way of inspiring participants to change their lives. Through group mentoring, participants came together in groups of up to 50 to discuss a host of topics, such as strategies for finding employment, staying sober, and finding stable housing. RExO staff members and/or designated mentors facilitated these meetings, guiding participants through their discussions and offering advice along the way. At the same time, participants offered support and advice to one another in a non-threatening, safe, and supportive environment. Many programs offered food and drinks during these events to encourage participation and to promote a safe space for sharing personal experiences. For example, at OIC of Broward County in Fort Lauderdale, the group mentor addressed a number of topics, such as staying clean, asking for help, and taking responsibility for one's actions. He did this through an informal and improvisational style that allowed everyone to participate and feel comfortable in the session. He also let the participants direct the conversation so that they were empowered to share their stories.

Group Events. Seven grantees held events such as family nights, celebrations, and other social or networking events and classified these as group mentoring. These events provided opportunities for participants to engage their families and friends in the program and to network with one another outside of regular programming. These events also celebrated participants' milestones, such as completing work readiness training or getting off probation or parole. For example, Connections to Success in Kansas City, MO, held an event called a "meet and greet" twice a month. This event included food, games, and occasionally guest speakers, giving RExO participants the opportunity to socialize, celebrate their successes, and become familiar with the concept of mentoring.

Group Workshops. Nine grantees offered workshops as part of their group mentoring services; they considered these to be group mentoring activities because they provided additional opportunities for peer exchange and informal learning. Some of these workshops were focused on soft skills and life skills training, and were designed to supplement, rather than duplicate, existing services. For example, Connection Training Services in Philadelphia offered workshops every Friday on topics such as life skills and parenting, health and HIV/AIDS prevention, and information on Philadelphia's labor laws.

Combining Individual and Group Mentoring

Fifteen grantees offered both individual and group mentoring to RExO participants. Grantees offering both approaches provided a great deal of flexibility for participants to choose what type of mentoring was best for them. The staff mentor at Odyssey House in New Orleans, who convened support groups and met with individual mentees, said that participants preferred to have multiple options for mentoring because their needs were so diverse. The mentor also added that some participants did not need intensive one-on-one mentoring, and preferred instead to attend support groups with their peers. This experience and others led some grantees to offer a combination of mentoring activities that could be tailored to individual needs.

Mentoring Service Delivery

Grantees used three different methods to deliver their mentoring programs. Sixteen operated the program internally and hired program staff members to coordinate the program; eight subcontracted with a mentoring provider; and two referred participants to other organizations.[39]

The majority of the sixteen grantees that used in-house mentoring hired mentoring coordinators or designated staff mentors to coordinate mentoring activities. These staff members were

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[39] These two grantees also facilitated group mentoring sessions in-house; however, most of their mentoring services were available through referrals. Because these grantees used two different methods, adding the number of grantees using each method totals more than 24.

responsible for planning—and sometimes facilitating—group mentoring events, recruiting and screening volunteer mentors, and monitoring mentor–mentee relationships.

The eight grantees who subcontracted with a designated mentoring provider to offer mentoring services did so in different ways. One grantee subcontracted with an organization that hired a staff person to serve as a mentor. Another grantee subcontracted with an individual consultant to provide group mentoring workshops. The other six grantees contracted with local providers to coordinate all of the mentoring activities, including recruiting volunteers, monitoring relationships, and facilitating group mentoring sessions.

There were several benefits to subcontracting for mentoring services, according to program staff members. First, it ensured that mentoring activities were consistently available and of high quality. Second, it allowed RExO grantees to focus on other services such as case management and employment services. Lastly, it provided mentees access to additional resources available through the provider organization. At the Talbert House in Cincinnati, the subcontracted mentoring provider had strong connections to community-based organizations and could help RExO clients access other services from its networks, such as those dedicated to providing food, housing, transportation, and medical care. Grantees did note that using subcontractors to provide this service did require regular and active monitoring, which they attempted to do through regular meetings with their subcontractors.

Finally, two grantees referred participants to mentoring services in the community but did not have formal agreements with the mentoring providers. For example, the St. Patrick Center in St. Louis identified several mentoring providers in the community to which they could refer participants for mentoring services such as substance abuse groups or support groups.

Mentor Recruitment, Training, and Matching

Grantees that offered mentoring in-house recruited volunteer mentors for both individual and group mentoring services. Staff members looked for stable mentors from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds who were willing to make a long-term commitment to the program. Mentors included church congregants, retired professionals, program alumni, university students, and other community members. Some grantees actively targeted ex-offenders to serve as mentors, though they stipulated that these volunteers had to be stable and have been out of prison for a certain length of time (usually at least two years). To recruit volunteers, program staff members conducted outreach to their church congregations (especially in the case of faith-based organizations), made presentations at local community events, posted flyers and advertisements around the community, and relied on word-of-mouth referrals.

Grantees' success in recruiting mentors varied widely. Grantees that were well-known organizations or that had well-established mentoring programs were fairly successful in

recruiting mentors. For example, Goodwill Industries of San Antonio had a strong presence in the community and as of the fall of 2010, it had more mentors than interested mentees. However, recruiting mentors was very difficult for many programs, occasionally to such an extent that it caused the program to discontinue its individual mentoring program.

Once potential mentors were identified, they were asked to submit an application to the RExO grantee to officially become a mentor. Programs usually conducted background and reference checks before a volunteer could enter the pool of eligible mentors. In addition to conducting these screens, grantees often had mentors undergo formal training; about half of the grantees had structured training that lasted from two hours to two days.

Once mentors had attended training, they entered the pool of mentors to be matched. Grantees made the matches with the needs and interests of the mentees in mind. Other factors that influenced matching included where mentors lived in relation to the mentees and suggestions from case managers. In general, program staff members noted there was no exact science to matching mentors and mentees; it was often just a question of "chemistry."

Once mentors began working with participants, they received support from the program, though the quality and intensity of this support varied widely by site. At least one program held mentor support groups to discuss strategies for engaging with mentees. Two other programs offered ongoing training activities for mentors on topics such as helping mentees with trauma, becoming a good leader, and dealing with difficult situations that arose with their mentees. For example, the Talbert House in Cincinnati, OH, implemented a mentor support structure in which mentors became "apprentice" mentors, where they shadowed and learned from mentor "coaches," before being assigned a mentee of their own. Grantees believed that because mentoring an ex-offender could be challenging, these types of supports were critical to retaining mentors in the program and providing strong mentoring services to participants.

Even though many RExO grantees developed the program structure, guidelines, and expectations for their mentoring services, implementing a volunteer-based mentoring program was very challenging for several reasons. First, community mentors were very difficult to recruit. Program staff members reported that a lack of interest and commitment among both mentees and mentors was the key reason for inconsistent participation in mentoring activities. Staff noted that many participants were not interested in what they believed was "just for children," or they did not think they needed the mentoring support. To increase interest and attendance in mentoring, grantees devised a variety of activities that they called mentoring, such as life skills workshops, support groups, and program-wide social events. Indeed, the majority of grantees did not have well-established individual mentoring programs even if they reported that they were available. For instance, 15 grantees made individual mentoring available to participants, but only six

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grantees (or one-fourth) had fully operational and well-established individual mentoring programs.

This type of mentoring is not consistent with what research shows to be strong mentoring support. Several studies suggest that strong mentoring programs are those that are structured as individual interventions based on one-on-one relations, are long in duration, and have frequent and consistent meetings between mentors and mentees (Keller, 2007). Thus, the individual mentoring programs established by the RExO grantees generally did not reach these more rigorous standards.

Challenges

Based on discussions with program staff members, the research team identified a variety of key challenges faced by the RExO grantees in delivering case management, employment services, and mentoring. Case File #4 summarizes the common challenges facing participants as they sought to obtain and retain employment.

- **Many case managers found it difficult to provide intensive, individualized support**. Many case managers were responsible for other tasks in the program, requiring that they balanced their case management duties with other roles such as intake, assessment, and job development. They consequently did not have the time to provide an ideal level of support.

- **Case managers struggled to maintain frequent contact with program participants after they exited the program.** While case managers tried to keep in touch, they were often hampered by the mobility of this highly transient population. Case managers frequently found disconnected phone numbers and were often met with unreturned phone calls.

- **Grantees were challenged in using labor market information to guide their job development efforts.** Participants' criminal backgrounds severely limited their options for employment, and often restricted their ability to pursue employment in promising sectors of the economy. As a result, grantees did their best to place participants in the positions that were available to ex-offenders, even if for many reasons these jobs were less than ideal.

- **Grantees had difficulty securing employer commitment to hiring participants at the completion of transitional employment.** Although program staff members were enthusiastic about transitional employment opportunities and their benefits for ex-offenders, they found it difficult to secure employer commitments to hire RExO participants at the end of the trial period. To encourage employers to do so, at least one grantee developed contracts with employers that outlined the roles and responsibilities of the employer at the completion of the trial period.

- **Engaging participants in mentoring was difficult.** Grantees found that some RExO participants were reluctant to participate in mentoring activities because they felt that they did not need the support or, worse, that it was beneath them. As a result, grantee staff members needed to work hard to encourage participation in mentoring activities, and even then many participants resisted it. In those few cases in which mentoring seemed quite strong, it was based on consistent contact between mentor and mentee, with close supervision by and reporting to a mentor supervisor.

- **Mentors were difficult to recruit and retain, especially for the ex-offender population.** As with many mentoring programs, volunteer mentors were difficult to recruit and retain long enough for them to have a meaningful mentor–mentee relationship. This situation was particularly the case with ex-offenders, as many potential volunteers had preconceptions about the mentee population that caused them to be unwilling to become involved. In addition, grantee staff members faced challenges in finding enough mentors of the appropriate age and gender. In particular, grantees had difficulty recruiting a sufficient number of males into the program, especially if they required matches to be same-sex.

> **Case File #4**
>
> Roman is in his late fifties and was released from a halfway house in 2009 after serving a year in state prison for burglary charges. He had a tenth grade education and spent most of his adult life going in and out of correctional facilities. His initial service plan included résumé development, job search, transportation assistance, GED preparation, photo identification, and medical referral. He is trying to access disability benefits because of a long-term disability. He has worked as a day laborer, hydraulic mechanic, and sanitation worker. With the help of the job developer at RExO, Roman found work as a carpenter's helper, making minimum wage. He received transportation passes from the program and attended group mentoring. A few months after he found a job, Roman was re-incarcerated on burglary charges. His case manager planned to visit the jail around the time of Roman's expected release date.

- **It was difficult to adequately prepare volunteers for mentoring relationships with ex-offenders.** Grantees and volunteer mentors noted that even though training was provided to mentors, it was often insufficient to prepare mentors to work successfully with ex-offenders. The larger challenge appeared to be that mentors just needed to "learn as they go" when developing a relationship with an ex-offender, and this was not easy to teach.

Summary

The RExO program provided a broad array of services to participants to help them access the resources they needed to secure and retain employment. The services discussed in this chapter provide valuable context for understanding the program impacts that will be discussed in the Impact Report.

Participants received an array of services, though the sequence of these services varied depending on how the programs structured their services. About two-thirds of the programs (16)

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focused on stable employment as the immediate goal for serving ex-offenders, which means that participants received work readiness training and job leads immediately after enrollment. The remaining third of the grantees focused on the provision of essential supportive services first, before participants were referred for jobs, which means that programs made sure participants were stable in their housing situation and were sober.

Case managers served as the "glue" in the provision of RExO services. They acted as human supports and served as coordinators of the various services that ex-offenders needed to receive if they were going to succeed. Other key findings related to case management services include the following:

- **Intensive case management support was a core strength of the RExO programs.** Case managers tried to maintain frequent contact with participants, focused on building trust and friendship, were deeply committed to working with ex-offenders, and were effective champions of the view that this population was worthy of support and a second chance**.**

- **Having a sufficient number of case managers was important to keeping caseloads manageable.** Grantees employed approximately 90 case managers (full-time and part-time), or 60 FTEs as of fall 2010 to support RExO participants. Having a steady pool of case managers allowed many programs to keep the caseloads manageable, though caseloads increased somewhat as enrollments increased and the number of case managers decreased toward the end of the program.

- **Through the support of case managers, participants gained access to valuable information about how to prepare for jobs, locate housing, and receive substance abuse treatment and other essential services**. Connecting participants to a network of community providers gave RExO programs greater access to resources, thereby increasing their chances of addressing the many barriers to employment that were common among ex-offenders. However, the scarcity of community resources, such as housing and substance abuse treatment programs, meant that RExO participants may not have gotten the support they needed when they needed it.

- **The use of incentives, such as bus tokens and cash payments, motivated participants to stay connected to the program**. The participants with whom we spoke reported that the incentives encouraged them to attend program activities and stay in touch with their case managers.

In addition to case management support, RExO programs offered an array of employment services, including work readiness training, transitional employment, job placement assistance, and education and vocational training. Key findings related to employment services include the following:

- **Nearly all programs offered work readiness training, though the duration of this training varied widely, ranging from less than 12 hours to more than 24**

hours. Work readiness training appeared to be well-developed, focusing on the core soft skills that participants needed to prepare for employment, such as résumé development, interviewing skills, and independent job search. Additional training on life skills, such as anger management and financial literacy, complemented this training.

- **Participants benefited from transitional jobs or trial employment, but this service was not provided by most grantees.** Seven grantees offered transitional jobs/trial employment to provide opportunities for immediate employment and income and a chance to build work-related soft skills. Positions were typically in the retail, food service, construction, and manufacturing industries. Whether these positions led to improved outcomes will be a topic for the Impact Report.

- **Job clubs allowed participants to network and share job leads.** Grantees that offered job clubs discovered that bringing participants together in a group to share job leads, challenges, and successes not only provided participants with a good source of moral support, but it also helped connect participants to more employment opportunities. Participants sometimes found job leads for which they were not qualified themselves, but they passed these along to other RExO participants as part of job clubs.

- **Outreach to employers was limited, due to factors such as insufficient job development staffing and the lack of marketing skills among them.** Grantees employed far fewer job developers to assist with job search and job development (24 FTE) than they did case managers (60 FTEs). Many of these job developers lacked sufficient training and experience with employer outreach and marketing, suggesting that more intentional staff development in this area could have been useful.

- **Grantees targeted the employers most likely to provide participants with employment opportunities**. Job developers made an effort to sell the RExO program to employers that had a history of hiring ex-offenders. They also strove to educate employers about the tax benefits and Federal bonds available if they hired ex-offenders.

Lastly, nearly all grantees offered mentoring services, including individual and group mentoring. The MIS data show that about two-thirds of participants (62.5 percent) received mentoring services of some kind between February 2010 to June 2011. But the quality and intensity of mentoring services were mixed and many programs struggled to implement strong mentoring programs. For instance, programs struggled to recruit a sufficient number of community volunteers, and as a result relied on group mentoring as a way to provide support to participants. While some participants in the focus groups indicated that they appreciated the support groups and group events that the RExO programs identified loosely as "mentoring," these events appeared to resemble other services available in the program, such as work readiness training or life skills training. In addition, ex-offenders, essentially men, were often more willing to participate in group mentoring than in individual mentoring, although group mentoring was often not as intensive as one-on-one mentoring. Despite this, group mentoring was a convenient

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way for programs to offer mentoring support because it did not rely on the involvement of difficult-to-recruit individual mentors. This is why the vast majority of grantees offered group mentoring activities.

The next chapter describes the wide range of partnerships that grantees developed to deliver these services and to connect participants to additional resources to enhance their service options.

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VII.   REXO PARTNERSHIPS

Important to the successful operation of the 24 RExO programs—and the subsequent success of RExO participants—were complicated networks of relationships grantees had with other programs and organizations that served ex-offenders in their communities. These "partnerships" varied considerably in formality and strength. In fact, the term *partnership* had different meanings for different grantees. For some grantees, a "partnership" was primarily a contractual relationship that officially designated an organization other than the grantee (i.e., a sub-grantee) as responsible for providing core RExO services (i.e., employment, case management, and mentoring services). For other grantees, any relationship they had with a program or organization not officially part of the RExO program was a "partnership." Common to both definitions is the notion that grantees worked with partners to supplement the services that their RExO programs were able to provide, thus increasing the likelihood for successful re-entry of program participants.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide insight into the wide array of partnerships of which grantees availed themselves. It starts by examining the different ways that grantees employed formal, sub-grantee relationships in the delivery of RExO services. The chapter then examines the services and programs made available to RExO participants through the informal partnerships that grantees established with a variety of organizations. Then the chapter discusses two types of partner-like relationships: (1) those through which participants received non-core services at grantee and sub-grantee organizations that were not part of the RExO programs themselves, and (2) those with various offices in the criminal justice community, such as probation and parole. Finally, this chapter identifies the challenges grantees confronted in building and maintaining partnerships and describes some successful steps they took to overcome those challenges.

Partnerships with Sub-Grantees

Many grantees relied on contractual relationships as a means of providing the various RExO services, or elements of those services, as discussed in Chapter VI. More specifically, one-half of the RExO grantees relied on sub-contractual relationships to fully provide one or more core RExO services (i.e., employment, case management or mentoring services). This section

examines this formal sense of "partnership" in which the partner is a "sub-grantee" organization, responsible for providing one of these core RExO services. It illustrates three ways that RExO grantees structured themselves in relation to these partners: (1) some developed no partnerships with sub-grantees; (2) some developed very tight, or integrated, partnerships with sub-grantee organizations; and (3) others established partnerships in which the sub-grantee organizations remained distinct and independent.

Model 1: Grantees with No Sub-Grantee Partnerships

Twelve RExO had no formal partners responsible for the delivery of core RExO services. As is illustrated in Exhibit VII-1, the grantees in this model provided the bulk of their core RExO services themselves, rather than relying on sub-grantees or partners to deliver those services. These grantees did typically form less formal partnerships with other organizations—they referred participants out to and had relationships of varying strength with other service-providing agencies—as is covered more in the section below on informal partnerships. As is also discussed below, these partner organizations tended to focus less on the delivery of core services and, instead, provided substance abuse, health, and other supportive services.

Exhibit VII-1:
Model 1: Grantees with No Sub-Grantee Partnerships

Also important to clarify is that grantees with no sub-grantee relationships may still have worked contractually with or paid other programs or individuals to provide services, which sometimes included distinct elements of core RExO services. Connection Training Services in Philadelphia, PA, for instance, contracted with a group to provide a day-long session on workplace safety during its three-week-long work readiness class. Similarly, Metro United Methodist Urban Ministry in San Diego, CA, hired a psychologist and a financial counselor to lead specific sessions of its month-long work readiness and life skills class. What makes these contractual relationships different from a sub-grantee relationship, however, is that the grantee was still

responsible for providing this core service. Grantees hired these contractors to provide discrete elements of a much larger core service, managed and operated by the grantees themselves.

Model 2: Grantees with Integrated Sub-Grantee Partnerships

Six grantees adopted a second model, illustrated in Exhibit VII-2, by working closely with one to four sub-grantee organizations to deliver core RExO services. Under this model, service delivery was highly integrated—often to such an extent that participants were not aware that they were receiving services from separate organizations. Often grantees accomplished this integration spatially, through co-location and similar arrangements, such as what occurs when partner organizations are all present at a One-Stop Career Center. In St. Louis, for instance, a sub-grantee, St. Vincent de Paul, provided case managers but housed them at the facilities of the grantee, St. Patrick Center. In Chicago, the grantee, Safer Foundation, hired the case managers who were then located at one of the five faith-based organizations (FBOs) with which Safer Foundation collaborated. Staff members located at the Safer Foundation's office coordinated case managers' work and ensured that RExO program staff members remained closely knit. Being located at the FBOs ensured that the case managers operated in the communities in which RExO program participants lived.

Exhibit VII-2:
Model 2: Grantees with Integrated Sub-Grantee Partnerships
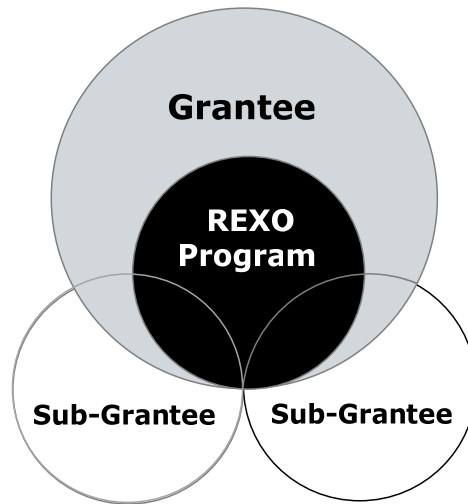

Even when program staff were not co-located, their work was still closely intertwined. In Boston, Span, Inc. was located just down the street from the sub-grantee, The Work Place, which allowed for frequent communication and ready access to one another's services. The Work Place also had a job developer on staff dedicated to working with RExO participants.

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In partnerships adhering to this model, the partners also closely coordinated services through frequent communication and other systems of information sharing. Staff members at Connections to Success in Kansas City, MO, in addition to those at Span, Inc., Safer Foundation, Community Partners in Action, St. Patrick Center, and Talbert House, all discussed how staff members from partner organizations met regularly with one another, typically weekly or bi-weekly, to share and update one another on participant progress and to coordinate any service delivery issues. Furthermore, staff members at several of these grantees discussed giving partners access to the RExO MIS, which made the partners' work with clients all the more transparent and readily available to one another.

Model 3: Grantees with Independent Sub-Grantee Partnerships

Exhibit VII-3 illustrates the third way that grantees organized the delivery of RExO services through formal partnerships. Each of the six grantees that adhered to this model served as the lead agency, which managed the grant and provided most, if not all, core RExO services. The grantee, in turn, contracted with various sub-grantee organizations to provide various core RExO services.

Exhibit VII-3:
Model 3: Grantees with Independent Sub-Grantee Partnerships
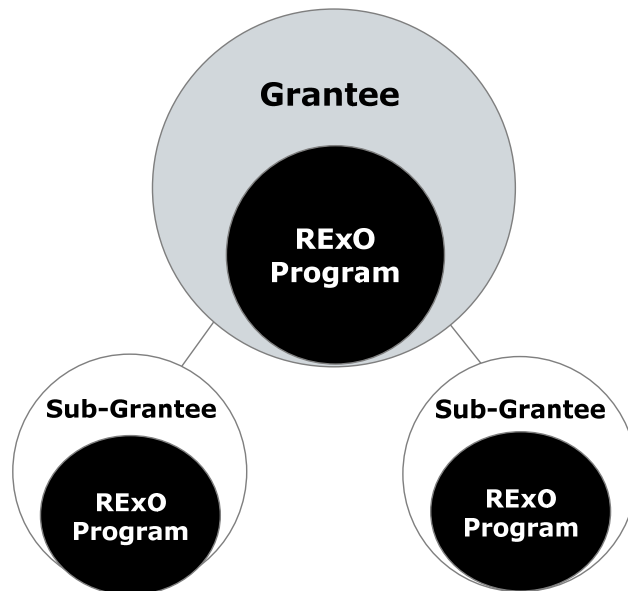
This model played out in two ways. In the first, each sub-grantee provided a single core component of the RExO program, such as mentoring. The Directors Council/Spectrum Resources in Des Moines, OIC of Broward County, Inc. in Fort Lauderdale, Primavera Foundation in Tucson, and Urban League of Greater Dallas and North Central Texas all enlisted a sub-grantee organization to provide mentoring services.

The second way this model played out was with sub-grantee organizations that offered complete, or nearly complete, slates of RExO services, operating something like affiliate or satellite offices of the grantee organization. The RExO program in Denver was the most striking example of this particular practice. All three partner organizations—The Empowerment Program (grantee), Denver Works (sub-grantee), and Turnabout, Inc. (sub-grantee)—coordinated their own case management, employment, and mentoring services separately. Similarly, SE Works (grantee) and Central City Concern (sub-grantee) in Portland both provided case management and various employment services to RExO program participants.

Either way, the distinctive feature of this partnering model was that sub-grantee organizations tended to operate at something of a distance from the grantee, and, if there were multiple sub-grantees, they operated at a distance from one another. Grantee and sub-grantee staff members, for instance, were not co-located. Additionally, formal meetings and reporting often took place on a monthly or even quarterly basis rather than weekly or bi-weekly. While this model clearly had advantages for the grantees that used it, it may also have had some drawbacks. Staff members at some of grantee organizations commented on how a greater degree of coordination and information sharing around the services they provided and resources they had might have improved their ability to leverage the services provided by partners. Sub-grantees that provided only single services for the RExO program rarely had access to the MIS. Lastly, making changes in procedures was sometimes difficult, more closely resembling changes between two organizations than those operating a single program. For example, staff members at two different grantees initially experienced low take-up in their mentoring programs and had to work with the sub-grantee organizations to redefine expectations, rework customer follow-up procedures, and clarify reporting processes to ensure that mentoring services improved.

Informal Partnerships

Separate from any formal, contractual grantee/sub-grantee relationships, all 24 grantees maintained partnerships of varying strengths with non-RExO programs and organizations. As was discussed in Chapter VI, grantees used these partnerships to ensure that program participants received the services they needed. In a few cases, these services were supplementary to or even slightly redundant with the core services provided through RExO. In most cases, though, grantees used these partnerships to fill important gaps in the services that their programs provided. Although the relationships that grantees had with these partner organizations varied considerably, the types of services accessed through these informal partnerships were relatively consistent across grantees. The services provided by informal partners included, but were not limited to, the following:

- assistance with housing and utilities;

- substance abuse treatment services;

- transportation assistance;

- mental health services and basic life skills coursework;

- employment and training services (mostly through One-Stop Career Centers but also through vocational rehabilitation programs);

- financial counseling;

- food, clothing and other basic staples;

- legal assistance (typically for securing IDs, expunging records, and guidance around child-support issues);

- health care, dental work, and eye care; and

- other services such as domestic abuse counseling.

The relationships that grantees had with these external organizations existed along a continuum. At one end of the spectrum were very limited, informal relationships, which mostly consisted of a referral list of providers to which grantee staff members sent RExO participants, but with which the grantee had only an informal and often distant relationship. These lists may have included both a comprehensive inventory of every available service in the community, often a tool developed by another provider, or a slightly more culled list including services that staff members felt had a good reputation. These types of referral lists are all that existed to constitute a relationship when grantees exhausted closer partnership options. Grantees also included these types of lists as part of a standard package of materials handed to a participant when first enrolled.

Most frequently mentioned amongst these sorts of weaker partnerships were providers of substance abuse treatment services; food, clothing, and housing assistance; and mental health services. Many times, these relationships were weaker because these organizations were smaller or had limited budgets or slots available for participants. As such, grantees could not rely on them consistently to provide services to RExO participants. Staff members at a few grantees also described having a very limited relationship with their local One-Stop Career Centers, which they felt offered relatively weak services for (or were not particularly accepting of) ex-offenders. It is worth pointing out that One-Stop Career Centers were the grantees in a few locations, and in other several sites there was a stronger connection to the local One-Stop Center Centers.

At the other end of this continuum were the stronger partnerships with external organizations. These partnerships were characterized by features such as a long history of collaboration, physical proximity of the organizations, and frequent information sharing. The types of services accessed through these partnerships seemed a less important determinant of the strength of the

relationships than other factors. In explaining what made these relationships strong, staff members mentioned the following factors.

- **The grantee made time for the partner to interact with RExO participants.** Some grantees invited partner organizations to present during relevant sessions of their work readiness courses (e.g., a financial counseling service during a session on financial planning). Others either invited partner programs to present to participants as part of the normal sequence of services or during group meetings that sometimes served as mentoring sessions. Partners often used this time to present information on their programs and even do enrollment on the spot.

- **The grantee had a contractual relationship with the partner organization in the past.** A grantee may have worked contractually with a partner organization in the years prior to the evaluation, but had to dissolve the contract due to factors other than performance (e.g., budget cuts). The partner organizations continued to respect one another and work together during the evaluation year, even if referrals were less frequent than they once were.

- **The grantee and the partner organization had a memorandum of understanding (MOU).** The terms of the relationship were formalized in an MOU, which helped to clarify each party's responsibilities and the scope of their relationship.

- **The grantee and the partner organization had a system for efficient and effective referrals.** Even if not codified in an MOU, partner organizations developed clear ways to hand off program participants. In its simplest form, such a system involved grantee staff members making warm hand-offs, scheduling appointments, arranging for transportation, and sometimes accompanying a participant to an appointment with the partner organization. Grantee organizations also communicated with partner organizations to familiarize themselves about eligibility criteria and intake procedures so that they made participants' entry into the partner program as easy as possible.

- **The grantee and the partner organization were physically close to one another.** Several grantees were located within the same building or within a few blocks of the organizations with whom they had informal partnerships. While proximity alone did not make for a strong relationship, it certainly made working together that much simpler when the programs agreed to work together.

- **Grantee staff members had personal relationships with staff members in the partner organization.** Through church, family, former employment, or other connections, particular staff members had strong knowledge of and relationships with staff members at other providers. Often, a staff member with such a relationship helped develop and maintain the partnership with the organization and served as the point person for a referral to that particular provider.

- **RExO staff members spent time at the partner organization's offices.** Similar to the co-location practices of some of the formal partnerships using Model 2, discussed above, a grantee located its staff members in other offices (e.g., one grantee secured a desk for a job developer at the local One-Stop Career Center).

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- **A grantee "piggybacked" on partnerships already established by its sub-grantee organizations.** One grantee with sub-grantee partners tapped into the strong relationships its sub-grantee partners had with other organizations.

Internal "Partnerships" for the Delivery of Non-core RExO Services

It was very common for grantee organizations to run programs and services that were not part of their RExO programs. As discussed in Chapter VI, grantees frequently relied on these other services to address participant barriers to employment such as a lack of housing, a lack of transportation, or struggles with substance abuse. Grantees typically did not or could not provide these sorts of services through their RExO programs directly because the RExO grant prohibited it. However, making these services available filled an important gap in a RExO program's ability to meet participants' needs.

Including many of these services under the rubric of "partnership" is certainly a stretch since the grantees provided these services themselves; another distinct organization was not involved. However, since the programs offering these services were administratively and fiscally separate from the RExO program, the relationship between RExO and these other programs has many of the same characteristics and issues as a relationship between the grantee and an external organization.

In many cases, it was difficult to disentangle these programs from RExO: the same staff members ran both programs; services overlapped; eligibility criteria for the various services were sometimes similar; and access to these non-RExO services was sometimes as simple as handing a participant off to a co-worker in the same office. At other grantee organizations, however, the divide between RExO and non-RExO programs was more pronounced. Grantees operated these other programs and services out of different buildings or different parts of the same building, and these other programs often had entirely separate enrollment processes. POCAAN in Seattle operated in both capacities. Some of its staff members were trained as chemical dependency counselors so they could provide drug counseling to participants as a matter of course; however, POCAAN had two other programs in which participants could enroll to receive formal, drug treatment services.

Another version of this form of "partnership" was the relationship that existed between some grantees and their sub-grantees that offered non-RExO services. Under these relationships, grantees coordinated with sub-grantees to enroll participants in other programs offered by that sub-grantee's parent organization. The types of services available, as with any of these more informal partnerships, fit into the bulleted list provided above, but were based on participant needs. Services such as substance abuse treatment and housing assistance were most prominent. The relationship between St. Vincent de Paul (sub-grantee) and St. Patrick Center (grantee) is a

good example of this kind of partnership. St. Vincent de Paul provided various services such as food, furniture, utility payments, legal assistance and transportation to people in crisis. St. Patrick Center's formal partnership with this sub-grantee, which existed only to the extent that St. Vincent de Paul provided case management, meant that RExO staff members were readily aware of the services that St. Vincent de Paul could provide to their RExO participants. Staff members were easily able to coordinate getting participants enrolled in those services if needed.

Partnerships with Criminal Justice Organizations

The partnerships that grantees had with criminal justice organizations—mostly probation and parole offices but also transitional or halfway housing providers and the courts—are discussed in two other locations in this report. Because these partnerships also functioned primarily to refer ex-offenders to RExO programs, they are discussed in Chapter IV, which deals with intake, recruitment and enrollment. Since the services that criminal justice organizations provide to ex-offenders tend to serve the larger ex-offender population, including any control-group members, these organizations functioned like alternative service providers, making any partnerships between them and grantees an apt subject for the following chapter covering alternative service providers. Grantees' partnerships with criminal justice organizations are relevant to this chapter, however, because through these partnerships RExO programs were able to strengthen participants' connections with criminal justice services and thereby ultimately improve participants' chances for success.

Broadly speaking, most grantees strengthened or maintained the relationships they had with probation and parole as well as other criminal justice partners. In large part, grantees conducted outreach to criminal justice partners, informing them of the various services they provided, which helped these partners know about RExO programs and made them more inclined to refer participants. However, when grantees were able to connect with specific staff members who supervised RExO program participants and discussed particular individuals' needs and accomplishments, grantees strengthened the network of support around these participants and thereby increased their chances for success. Staff members at Spectrum Resources in Des Moines, for instance, connected with parole and probation staff members and informed them of the progress their individual RExO participants were making. This communication helped probation and parole officers to better understand what these participants were going through. If the need arose, a participant's probation and/or parole officer was able to direct that individual into relevant services or support the RExO program's ability to do so. As one person in Des Moines noted, if the RExO program was having difficulty with a participant, probation and parole could "intervene in being the hammer."

This feedback loop may have helped participants in other ways. First, caseloads for parole and probation officers were already high, and with budget cuts and other policy changes, they seemed to be trending higher. The connections RExO program staff members developed with a participant's probation or parole officer may have helped to ensure that RExO participants were getting attention when they might otherwise not have been.

Second, these connections may have helped participants access the specialized services that some probation and parole departments offered to certain populations of ex-offenders. Denver, for instance, had a team of community reentry specialists with special funding to assist homeless parolees. Ex-offenders sometimes were not familiar enough with probation and parole services to let their officers know they qualified for these services, or probation/parole officers may have seen these individuals too infrequently to identify issues when they arose. RExO staff members, however, tended to stay in close contact with participants and often were able to notify probation/parole officers when it mattered. Furthermore, RExO staff members were better able to advocate on a participant's behalf, thus increasing the likelihood of that individual getting these specialized services.

Third, strong relationships between a number of grantees and probation or parole offices allowed for some form of co-location of RExO and probation or parole officers. This spatial proximity likely benefited RExO participants. In St. Louis, for example, St. Patrick Center had parole officers work out of its office during one day of the week, working specifically with RExO participants. Community Partners in Action in Hartford and Fresno Career Development Institute in Fresno did (or attempted) something similar. Using the converse of this approach, Arizona Women's Education and Employment in Phoenix, Metro United Methodist Urban Ministry in San Diego, and Connections to Success in Kansas City all placed grantee staff members in probation and parole offices as a way of increasing the information probation and parole officers received on the RExO participants they supervised.

Building and Growing Partnerships

The above sections focus on the various types of partnerships that grantees built. The next sections cover the reasons why these relationships were worth building, some of the challenges inherent in building partnerships, and strategies that proved valuable in doing so.

The Benefits of Having Program Partners

Thus far, this chapter has focused on one clear benefit that partnerships brought to grantees, namely the additional services they made available to program participants. In other words, by engaging in partnerships, grantees were able to provide program participants with services to

which they otherwise would not have had access. Staff members at grantee organizations, however, pointed out some additional ways that partnerships could be helpful.

- **Partnerships provided new business opportunities**. Even though organizations often formed partnerships around certain grants or other specific purposes, once these relationships were in place, they opened up opportunities that partners might not have first envisioned. Many of the formal, sub-grantee–grantee partnerships discussed earlier in the chapter, for example, were the result of these organizations having frequently worked together in the past, before the RExO program existed. Since a partnership was essentially a way of expanding the expertise an organization had at its disposal, partnerships likely put some organizations—especially smaller ones—in a better position to pursue new funding opportunities. Staff members at Connections to Success in Kansas City, for instance, discussed working with partnerships, formed under RExO, in the search for new funding opportunities.

- **Partnerships increased grantees' standing in the community.** To the extent that grantees engendered a sense of gratitude or appreciation among partner organizations for carrying out their side of the bargain, as was expressed by the staff members of several partner organizations, grantees' reputation in the community improved. As one grantee staff member put it, they worked hard to make sure their partnerships were mutually beneficial and that the partner organizations benefited from these relationships. Known to more people and organizations as an effective agent in the community, the grantee was better positioned to build new partnerships and seek out additional sources of funding in the future.

- **Partnerships strengthened the quality of RExO services**. Staff members at Odyssey House LA, Inc. in New Orleans, for instance, spoke about how collaboration with their partner organizations helped deepen their understanding of RExO participants and improved their ability to address the issues facing them. Staff members at many grantees spoke about how partner organizations served as valuable resources for learning about RExO participants. Grantee staff members learned information about program participants when those individuals did not communicate regularly or were not forthcoming. Partners also provided one other way for RExO staff members to locate participants when they disappeared.

Partnership Challenges

While there were multiple benefits to having partnerships, building and maintaining them was sometimes challenging. As discussed above in relation to the third model of sub-grantee partnerships, sometimes communication between partners was infrequent and not systematic, leading to challenges in day-to-day program coordination. Staff members from grantee and partner organizations identified several other challenges that RExO grantees faced in working with partners, including both formal sub-grantees and organizations with which they had less formal relationships.

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Staff members at several grantees discussed how insufficient funding was a substantial barrier to forming or maintaining strong partnerships. In some cases, the partner agencies were the ones with limited funds. While happy with the quality of the services provided by many partners, grantee staff members spoke about how certain programs, especially the smaller ones, simply ran out of money to serve participants. This lack of consistently available services led to frustration on the part of both program staff and RExO participants and certainly affected the ability of grantees to rely on certain partner organizations on a regular basis. In other cases, it was the grantee that lacked funding. Staff members at a few grantees discussed how diminishing RExO funds over the years allowed for fewer formal partnerships than they would have preferred; reductions in funding meant that grantee organizations had to dissolve certain sub-contractual relationships. This situation arose for at least three grantees prior to start of the evaluation.

Another challenge for grantees was dealing with the various requirements imposed by partner organizations. Often, RExO staff members discussed the restrictions or requirements—such as curfews or mandatory group meetings—placed on RExO participants who were also enrolled in various residential programs. Most frequently, though, RExO staff members commented on the demands participants faced as a result of their involvement with the criminal justice system—the courts, probation or parole officers, and transitional facilities. The criminal justice system, for instance, commonly requires ex-offenders to:

- meet with parole or probation officers;
- find work after release, often within a few weeks;
- bear the cost of transitional housing (typically in the range of $10–$20/day);
- bear the cost of supervision by probation or parole (typically in range of $40-$80/month); and
- undergo testing for substance abuse.

RExO program staff members were usually familiar with these requirements, but employers and many partner programs were often not. Even when they were aware of these requirements, partners did not always understand the importance of ex-offenders meeting them and doing so in a timely way. Since grantees were ultimately responsible for RExO participants' success, this situation put them in a difficult position—enforcing one program's set of requirements over another—especially when partner programs had their own stringent demands. Employers, similarly, did not always understand or were not accepting of frequent daytime interruptions or restrictions on their employees' ability to work. Grantees learned that not all partners or employers were flexible enough to work with ex-offenders, and subsequently sought out different partner programs.

Staff members from quite a few RExO programs also commented on the poor quality of services provided by some partner organizations. The issues identified by these staff members included

poor customer service skills, questionable financial practices, a lack of awareness of ex-offender issues, a lack of skills tailored to ex-offenders, and poor client feedback. A couple of grantees in particular noted how their One-Stop Career Centers were unhelpful and uncooperative when it came to serving ex-offenders. In most cases, the relationships with these poor-performing organizations were relatively informal, which made ending the partnerships as simple as no longer referring RExO participants. In other cases, the contractual nature of these relationships made it more difficult for grantees to resolve these issues. In most cases, these particular contracts were not renewed.

A few other challenges were noteworthy in the partnerships of a handful of grantees.

- **A partner organization worked with participants differently than the grantee.** In a few cases, a partner had different eligibility criteria than the grantee. In others, the partner's service mission or service philosophy was different. Some grantees overcame these kinds of challenges through increased dialogue. Others came away with a better sense of their partnering limits.

- **Partnerships were dependent on specific staff.** As discussed above, some partnerships were born out of the relationships staff members had with other organizations. If the critical staff members left, so too might the partnership.

- **Too few participants accessed a program.** For a variety of reasons, ranging from limited participant interest to insufficient follow-through on referrals, take-up in some partner programs was low.

- **The grantee was unwilling to work with partners.** At least two grantees worked with very few, if any, partners. Respondents from these grantees expressed no real need to work with other programs and felt that their organizations were able to provide sufficient services to RExO participants. Interestingly, staff members at other organizations in these communities noted that these particular grantees were not willing to work with them or were simply organizations with which it was not easy to work.

Of particular interest to this report is that few grantees seemed to face any challenges with partner organizations around the implementation of the impact study in the fifth year. As discussed in Chapter IV, the impact study did create friction with criminal justice partners for several grantees, which likely contributed to some diminished capacity for these grantees to recruit participants into RExO and required these grantees to reconfigure intake and recruitment practices. Other partnerships, however, seemed relatively unhampered. At least three grantees found that partners were resistant to the evaluation initially. While a partner with one grantee left prior to the start of the evaluation, the partners with the other two later reconsidered and continued to work effectively with the grantee.

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Growing Partnerships and Overcoming Challenges

Staff members of grantee and partner organizations advocated several approaches for building and sustaining successful partnerships. These practices come into play during each of the three major stages of partnership building: (1) finding promising partnership opportunities; (2) entering into and ending partnerships; and (3) maintaining partnerships.

Finding Promising Partnership Opportunities

One significant issue that confronted many grantees is how to build partnerships in the first place. To what sources did the grantees turn in building partnerships? Staff members of grantees and partner programs provided the following examples of practices and resources for identifying potential partners.

- **Coalitions of service providers and re-entry meetings for ex-offenders were useful in making new connections.** The research team documented that at least 11 grantee communities had some kind of coalition of service providers organized around ex-offender issues or issues with strong overlap (e.g., homelessness). Meetings of coalition members offered tremendous networking opportunities for RExO program staff members and were responsible for many partnerships. Respondents in four communities also reported that re-entry meetings for ex-offenders, typically organized by probation and parole offices, were an important means of connecting participants with services.

- **Personal networks of staff members and program participants provided a strong basis for partnership building.** As discussed above, partnerships often blossomed due to the personal connections of staff members. Despite the risks inherent in depending too much on particular staff members to maintain these relationships, this resource seemed to be a strong foundation on which to build partnerships for many grantees.

- **Long-standing relationships were the basis for strong partnerships.** Many grantees' strongest partnerships arose from relationships they had been nurturing for years or even decades. Since many grantees were able to draw on existing resources for this grant, similar programs might be able to do the same.

- **A strong reputation for both service delivery and partnering attracted potential partners.** Certainly no organization wants to have a bad reputation, but respondents did identify a few grantees that were not well known for being team players. In contrast, having a cooperation-based philosophy and a high quality of services helped to ensure for several grantees that other programs wanted to partner with them, giving them the luxury of choosing with whom they wanted to work.

- **Close partners were often good partners**. As highlighted above, physical proximity was conducive to a strong partnership. Even if a nearby program had limited slots or was lacking in other ways, its proximity could make it a strong partner.

Entering Into and Ending Partnerships

Several of the challenges identified above refer to issues that may have been present well before grantees first noticed them, which suggests that circumspection and thoughtfulness in choosing partners played important roles in averting conflicts and other partnership issues. Respondents from grantee organizations identified a few strategies for being smart about what organizations to partner with, which included choosing the right partners and dissolving partnerships when they no longer worked.

- **Research a partner program before providing referrals.** Staff members at a few grantees pointed out how their organizations' procedures included doing an investigation of an organization before referring program participants to that organization. This research included visiting the program and meeting with staff members to learn about the program itself, and how it fit with the services RExO provided. The goal was to make sure that a relationship was mutually beneficial. Speaking about learning the hard way from one particularly bad referral relationship, one grantee staff member noted, "we've been burned, but we learned."

- **Know when to end a partnership.** Staff members at a couple of grantees acknowledged that some partnerships simply do not work out. When they no longer provide mutual benefits, or when the drawbacks of working together begin to outweigh the advantages, it may be time to end them.

Maintaining Partnerships

The single biggest lesson that grantees drew from their experiences maintaining partnerships of all types was that good communication and coordination between partners were key. Almost half of the grantees discussed various steps they took to ensure high levels of coordination. Many of these steps included techniques discussed earlier in this chapter: co-locating staff members at partner organizations; setting up frequent meetings for partner staff members to discuss participants or other aspects of their organizations' operations; and sharing information on participant progress and services delivered through shared access to the MIS or regular reports.

Moreover, grantee and partner program staff often emphasized that communication should flow in both directions, with partner organizations informing grantee organizations of their progress and grantee organizations doing likewise for their partners. As one staff member put it, "we just feed them," referring to the large amount of information the grantee gave to partner organizations about every aspect of its service delivery. This kind of outward sharing was especially important with organizations from which grantees expected to get referrals, such as probation and parole, but it was also important not to ignore this kind of sharing with other partners.

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Another lesson shared by grantees was to be flexible in how partnerships worked. One grantee, for instance, found that services for a particular provider were becoming too expensive. Rather than end that partnership, which was beneficial to their participants, staff members at that grantee found a way to enroll participants in another program that had the means to pay for the services in question.

The bottom line is that many partners shared the same motivation and drive to assist participants and it was the job of all partners involved to minimize obstacles for ensuring that this assistance happened. As a staff member from one grantee noted, partnerships are successful when everyone feels part of the same team.

Summary

Grantees sometimes lacked the capacity to provide the full slate of required RExO services. They also rarely had the capacity to provide all the programs and services needed to meet the many needs of the ex-offender population. In order to fill these gaps in their capacity, they reached out to other programs and services to form partnerships. It was through these partnerships that grantees were able to offer a broader range of services. These partnerships also helped grantees increase the likelihood of obtaining other funding by increasing their effective capacity, strengthening their standing in the community, and further enriching their services by providing staff members with the means for better knowing their own program participants.

The partnerships formed by the RExO grantees took many different forms. In the area of formal, sub-grantee relationships for the delivery of core RExO services (e.g., case management, employment, and mentoring services), three different models existed. Half of the grantees used no sub-grantees at all. Six grantees had tightly coordinated sub-grantee relationships defined by co-located staff, frequent opportunities for information-sharing, and other systems designed to increase transparency and communication. The remaining six had sub-grantees that operated somewhat independently of the grantee and one another, in some cases offering a full range of core RExO services and in others just single components.

Other partnerships were less formal and tended to involve referrals for non-core RExO services such as housing, substance abuse treatment, and transportation, although they may have included support for pieces of core RExO services such as work readiness courses or vocational training. These relationships with external organizations ranged from relatively weak to quite strong, based on various ways that grantees connected and coordinated with these partner organizations. Stronger partnerships were characterized by: grantees making time for partner staff to interact with RExO participants, past or present formal agreements with partner organizations, systematized referral mechanisms, physical proximity of partner organizations, close staff personal relationships and co-location of staff in a partner's offices.

Two other partnership-like relationships existed among RExO grantees: internal "partnerships" with programs and services operated by the grantee or its contracted sub-grantees that were not part of the RExO program, and informal partnerships with criminal justice organizations. Since the latter partnerships with criminal justice organizations functioned primarily to refer ex-offenders to RExO or as alternative providers of ex-offender services, they are discussed elsewhere in this report. These partnerships are relevant to this chapter, however, because of the way in which criminal justice staff members worked with grantee staff members to share information, increase the degree of services RExO participants accessed, and provide a larger network of support for these individuals.

Grantees faced many challenges in building and maintaining partnerships but managed to overcome many of these challenges through a variety of practices. The challenges included a lack of funding to support partnerships, complex and sometimes competing restrictions placed on ex-offenders by other programs, partners with different approaches, partnerships dependent on particular staff members staying with the organization, low quality of services provided by partners, low take-up rates in partner programs, and resistance among some grantees themselves to building partnerships. Grantees overcame and mitigated these challenges through a variety of strategies that included identifying promising partnership opportunities through local provider coalitions, staff member networks, and long-standing relationships; attracting partners by building up their reputations in their communities; entering into partnerships with full knowledge of the potential partners; knowing when to end partnerships that were not working; and maintaining strong partnerships through good, frequent, and systematic communication and coordination.

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VIII. ALTERNATIVES TO REXO

Unlike prior chapters, which focus on various aspects of the RExO grantees and the services they offered under the program, this chapter focuses attention on the programs and services within grantee communities that offered alternatives to RExO programs, looking at their availability, accessibility, and quality. The information in this chapter comes primarily from interviews with a wide array of individuals within grantee communities, representing grantees, partners, alternative service providers, criminal justice organizations, and employers.

Understanding these alternative services would be important in any evaluation of the RExO program, as they provide important context for the program itself. Insofar as this particular evaluation is a random-assignment impact study, which examines how RExO program participants fare compared to their control-group counterparts, this chapter assumes added significance as an examination of what control-group members might have accessed in lieu of receiving RExO services. While this chapter does not say definitively what services control-group members received or what their experiences were like—the Impact Report will include these data, which will come from the survey of study participants—it does provide valuable insight into the services that were available to them in their communities.[40]

This chapter begins by providing detailed accounts of the many programs and services that existed during the evaluation period, suggesting what alternatives control-group members may have availed themselves of in their communities. The chapter next evaluates the accessibility and quality of these programs. Finally, the chapter examines the services offered by partner organizations in the criminal justice system; these services are accessible to most if not all ex-offenders.

Identifying Alternative Provider Programs

During both rounds of site visits to RExO grantees in 2010, research team members identified, met with the staff members of, and otherwise investigated organizations within grantee

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[40] The survey, which will be covered in the Impact Report, will address what services study participants—both program- and control-group members—actually received.

communities that provided services to ex-offenders that were similar to the ones offered by
RExO programs. These organizations (1) served ex-offenders as a specific population or as part
of a larger population that included a high proportion of ex-offenders, such as homeless
individuals, and (2) provided one or more of the core services that RExO programs were required
to provide under the terms of their grants. As is outlined in Chapter VI, these core services
included case management; employment-related services, including both work-readiness courses
and job search and placement assistance; and mentoring. Not surprisingly, these alternative
programs, or their parent organizations, provided many other employment-related and/or
supportive services, including vocational training, educational services, housing, mental health
services, and substance-abuse services. Research team members identified the core services as
well as the supplemental ones.

As seen in Exhibit VIII-1, this investigative effort yielded 97 alternative providers across the 24
grantee communities. The number of providers investigated in any given community ranged
from two to eight. This variation in the number of alternative providers in a community likely
reflects, to some degree, the actual availability of providers. Interview respondents in a few
communities said that ex-offender services were relatively abundant in their community, while
respondents in a few other communities noted the relative paucity of ex-offender services in their
communities. Still, this variation in the number of alternative providers is likely also a product
of the research team's use of snowball sampling; this investigative effort was not a
comprehensive survey or inventory. Using this technique, research team members identified
potential alternative providers through referrals from grantee staff members and the referral lists
grantees provided to study participants assigned to the control group. In some cases, research
team members were unable to investigate likely alternative providers due to time constraints or
due to these providers being unwilling to participate in interviews. While it is likely that this
effort overlooked some alternative providers, the pool of 97 providers—with mean and median
of four providers per community—gives considerable insight into the alternatives to RExO that
were available to ex-offenders within grantee communities during the evaluation.

These 97 alternative providers run the gamut of organizational types. The programs in these
organizations that serve ex-offenders range from several months to several decades old, and they
operated as both independent organizations and as part of much larger organizations.[41] Budgets
for these programs ranged from the tens of thousands to the tens of millions of dollars and the
parent organizations may well have been even bigger. As was the case for the RExO grantees
themselves (see Chapter III), some alternative providers were local affiliates or branches of
national organizations such as Goodwill Industries, the Urban League, the Salvation Army,

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[41] In fact, a small number of these providers are separate programs within RExO grantee organizations.

Catholic Charities, or Strive. Others included One-Stop Career Centers, which can be publically or privately operated but relied on a considerable amount of public funding. Other providers were local Mayor's or Sheriff's offices, Jewish Family Services organizations, and a variety of smaller faith- and community-based organizations.

Exhibit VIII-1:
Characteristics of the Sample of Alternative Providers
in the 24 RExO Grantee Communities

	Number of Alternative Providers
Alternative Providers Investigated	97
Provided one core service similar to RExO[*]	15
Provided two core services similar to RExO[*]	21
Provided three core services similar to RExO[*]	48
Provided four core services similar to RExO[*]	13
Minimum number identified per community	2
Maximum number identified per community	8
Mean number identified per community	4
Median number identified per community	4

* Core RExO services investigated include: employment (broken down into work readiness courses and job search and placement assistance), case management, and mentoring services.

NOTE: Members of the research team investigated more than 97 organizations, but only those 97 offering one of the four core services noted above were included in the analysis.

The Availability of Alternative Provider Programs

Many core RExO services were readily available to both program- and control-group members through alternative providers within grantee communities. As is illustrated in Exhibit VIII-1, above, most of the 97 providers investigated offered multiple core services, with core services including employment (broken down into work readiness courses and job search and placement assistance), case management, and mentoring services. Exhibit VIII-2 shows that out of the 97 alternative providers investigated, 81 offered some form of work readiness services, 81 provided job search and placement services, and 71 provided case management services. In every grantee community, all three of these core services were available through some combination of alternative providers.

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Exhibit VIII-2:
Services Available at the 97 Alternative Provider Organizations
Across the 24 RExO Grantee Communities

Note: Numbers indicate the total number of alternative provider organizations, offering at least one of the four core RExO services as defined in VII-3, within RExO grantee communities that the research team investigated. Due to time constraints on site, limits of snowballing techniques and the willingness of program staff to cooperate, some provider programs are likely excluded.

At the same time, as Exhibit VIII-2 illustrates, the alternative provider programs as a whole were less likely to offer other, non-core ex-offender programs and services. Only 39 alternative providers offered some form of vocational training and even fewer provided substance abuse services (31), housing services (28), educational services (28), and mental health services (21). Similar to their RExO program counterparts, many of these alternative provider programs simply referred their participants to partner organizations rather than offer all these services directly.

It is notable how few alternative providers offered mentoring services. Only 20 of the 97 alternative providers considered had a mentoring program, and mentoring providers were not available in nine grantee communities. Although this finding does not necessarily mean that alternative mentoring programs were entirely absent from these nine communities, it does suggest how limited in availability mentoring services were compared to other forms of re-entry services for ex-offenders; they were the least available of any core or non-core RExO services.

The Accessibility of Alternative Provider Programs

Another important factor to consider is the accessibility of alternative programs. Just because a service is available within a grantee community does not mean that ex-offenders—and control-group members in particular—know how to find it or enroll in it.

Program visibility was one important aspect of accessibility that seemed to be an issue in some communities and with some providers. The relevant variable seemed to be whether these programs came to the attention of ex-offenders' probation and/or parole officers, who were often the individuals who referred ex-offenders to various re-entry services. Interview respondents from various organizations in Fort Lauderdale, Dallas, and San Diego all noted how parole and probation officers in those communities were very familiar with the available alternative providers and likely to refer ex-offenders to them. In a few other communities, such as New Orleans, Portland, and Kansas City, RExO program participants were the ones to discuss their familiarity with various alternative providers, often through referrals from probation and parole staff.

Respondents for organizations in three communities expressed some concerns about whether these various alternative providers came to the attention of ex-offenders. One concern was that probation and parole may have taken it for granted that ex-offenders were already familiar with these alternative provider programs. Another concern was that communication between all providers in these communities was simply more limited. These concerns may also echo ones raised in yet another community in which control-group members would have needed to return to their probation or parole officers for referrals after getting assigned to the control group in RExO rather than get a referral list from the RExO grantee. The concern raised in that community was that control-group members may simply have never ended up reaching the alternative provider programs in the first place, due to all the same barriers that prevent them from successfully engaging in many aspects of society.

Another important element of accessibility was the location of the alternative provider. Respondents in two grantee communities specifically commented on how alternative providers tended to be clustered in very specific neighborhoods in these larger urban areas, though the RExO grantees themselves were not situated in these neighborhoods. To the extent that control-group members (and other ex-offenders) resided in these neighborhoods, they should have been able to access the providers. However, alternative providers, and services for ex-offenders in general, tended to be particularly thin in many of the neighborhoods where ex-offenders resided. As mentioned earlier, many respondents noted that a lack of transportation is a barrier to many ex-offenders when it comes to successful re-entry. Traveling to other neighborhoods in RExO communities is often difficult for ex-offenders, who frequently depend on often-poor public transportation systems.

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A third element of accessibility to alternative providers' programs was their eligibility criteria, which ranged from restrictive to open. At the restrictive end of the spectrum, one alternative provider only served individuals ordered by the court to attend. At the open end of the eligibility spectrum were providers who accepted a group of individuals much broader than ex-offenders. In many cases, these programs targeted low-income and/or homeless individuals, who tended to include large numbers of ex-offenders. In other cases, such as with the One-Stop Career Centers, these alternative providers served even broader categories of individuals. The danger with this overly accessible type of alternative provider was that the programs are open to so many people that the services may be less relevant to the needs of ex-offenders. Many of the alternative provider programs occupied the middle of the eligibility spectrum and tended to serve individuals roughly similar to those served by RExO.

A fourth element of accessibility was service capacity. Some providers seemed to have had too few slots available for serving ex-offenders, leading to long wait times and few opportunities for services. A few interview respondents commented that some alternative provider programs were simply overwhelmed and that it was difficult for ex-offenders to enroll in them. Based on the partially complete information available on enrollment numbers for the 97 alternative providers investigated in this report, limited access may have been an issue for some programs, especially the few that served fewer participants than the RExO grantees. Yet, a sizable number of alternative provider programs appeared to serve at least as many individuals as RExO grantees, if not many more. The larger concern respondents may have been voicing here is their personal viewpoint that there are too few re-entry services for ex-offenders in any community.

The Quality of Alternative Provider Services

A third factor to consider is the quality of the services these alternative programs provided. Service quality is not easy to assess based solely on qualitative data collected during time-limited interviews with staff members. As one measure of program quality, the research team examined the intensity of the services offered by alternative providers. As another, the research team considered the views expressed by interview respondents in grantee communities.

In order to measure the intensity of the services offered by the 97 alternative providers, the members of the research team collected information such as hours spent in the program (for work readiness programs), whether the service was provided directly or sub-contracted, the case manager-to-participant ratio (for case management), and the frequency of the service (for mentoring). Members of the research team then compared the information they collected about these services to the same services offered by the RExO grantee within that community. Finally, members of the research team determined for the core services (e.g., work readiness, job search and placement assistance, case management, and mentoring) whether the given alternative provider's services were roughly comparable to, much more intense than, or much less intense

than the same services provided by the RExO grantee.[42] Given the limits of the information collected and the time spent on site, research team members were very conservative in their estimates. They erred on the side of assuming that any two services were roughly comparable unless there was considerable evidence indicating otherwise.[43] Exhibit VIII-3 summarizes the research team's ratings.
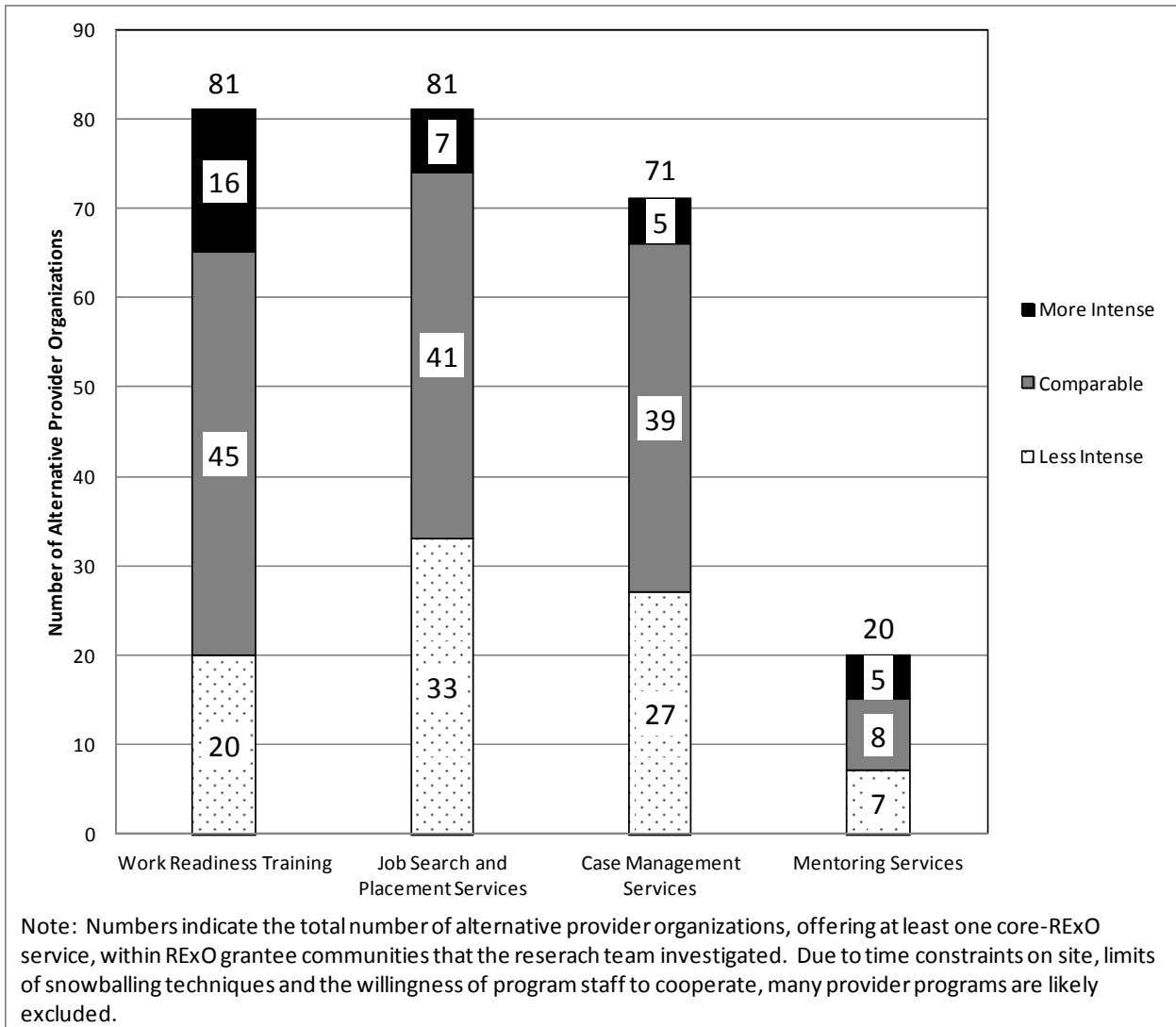
The key finding illustrated in Exhibit VIII-3 is that although approximately half of the core services offered by alternative providers are roughly comparable to those offered by their RExO counterparts, the services provided by RExO programs overall were slightly more intense. The details are as follows.

- The roughly comparable band of services (i.e., the middle band) accounts for a little more than half of the work readiness training services, job search and placement services, and case management services (55.5 percent, 50.6 percent and 54.9 percent respectively). Slightly less than half of the mentoring services provided by alternative providers were roughly comparable to those provided by RExO (40 percent).

- For work readiness training and mentoring services, the percentage of alternative provider services rated more intense (19.7 percent and 25 percent, respectively) was somewhat smaller than the percentage of those rated less intense (24.7 percent and 35 percent, respectively). In other words, the services provided by RExO grantees in these areas appeared to have been slightly more intense, on average, than those provided by the alternative providers in their communities. Variation across sites, and the actual intensity of the services received by control group members, will be a focus of the impact analysis.

- For job placement and search services and case management services, the percentage of alternative provider services rated more intense (8.6 percent and 7 percent, respectively) was considerably smaller than the percentage of those rated less intense (40.7 percent and 38 percent, respectively). This finding suggests that RExO versions of these services were considerably more intense than their alternative provider counterparts, on average.

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[42] Intensity for this assessment was measured by the number of days and/or hours spent in a given activity.

[43] The rule of thumb was that roughly double the intensity equated to "more intense" and roughly half as intense equated to "less intense." For instance, a three-day work readiness course offered by an alternative provider would be "less intense" than its RExO counterpart if the RExO work readiness course was 6 or more days and more intense if the RExO counterpart was less than a day and a half. Otherwise, the programs were considered "roughly comparable" to one another.

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Exhibit VIII-3:
Relative Intensity of Core Services Offered by the 97 Alternative Providers
Compared to those Offered by RExO Grantees

Note: Numbers indicate the total number of alternative provider organizations, offering at least one core-RExO service, within RExO grantee communities that the reserach team investigated. Due to time constraints on site, limits of snowballing techniques and the willingness of program staff to cooperate, many provider programs are likely excluded.

Staff members from grantees and other organizations suggested several reasons why RExO programs might offer a higher-quality experience than those offered by alternative providers in their communities. One reason offered by respondents is that many alternative providers lack the proper focus on ex-offenders' overall needs. Respondents in several communities spoke about how alternative providers may have focused heavily on specific services such as those dealing with substance abuse or housing, while offering little in the way of services that either met ex-offenders' immediate need for employment or offered support through case management. Generally, alternative programs did not offer the comprehensive package of services provided by

RExO programs. As a result, ex-offenders needed to shop around, combining several programs to meet their overall needs.

Limited funding was another reason suggested why some alternative providers might offer services that are of lower quality than those provided by RExO programs. Interview respondents in several communities spoke about the role that the steady and sizable funding from ETA played in their ability to provide a full slate of services, especially as many other organizations were struggling for funds in the economic downturn. Respondents commented that employment services, in particular, are expensive and not as easy to provide in less well-funded programs.

To the extent that RExO grantees provided higher-quality services, it may have been due in large part to their ability to offer individual attention. As discussed in Chapter VI, RExO case managers played an important role in guiding participants through the program and ensuring that they had access to the support network they may not have been getting elsewhere in their lives. They may even have provided employment services or supplemented the services provided by other program staff. Staff members of several RExO programs pointed out that one of the most important things their programs offered was the ability for staff members to spend in-depth time with participants, building strong bonds and providing a more comprehensive experience than what was offered by many alternative providers.

As discussed previously in the context of accessibility, some alternative providers had much less narrow eligibility requirements than RExO programs. While they may have, in theory, served ex-offenders, they targeted types of individuals in categories that included ex-offenders but were far broader in scope (e.g., homeless people, low-income families, individuals in need of parenting services, or unemployed individuals). Subsequently, ex-offenders that were served by these providers may not have received services particularly specialized to their needs. While this broader approach may have helped many ex-offenders, respondents from a few RExO communities were concerned that such programs were either spreading their resources too thin or offering services that were too "light" to support the more-intense needs of ex-offenders. Even if they achieved short-term employment success, for example, the ex-offenders might have lacked the foundation they needed for staying out of prison in the long-term.

One last reason why the pool of alternative providers as a whole might have offered services of lower quality than those of RExO programs is that this pool seemed to include a few fundamentally suspect organizations. Respondents in a few RExO communities spoke about "fly-by-night" organizations or places that "took advantage" of ex-offenders. They mentioned, for example, residential facilities that earn money by housing ex-offenders while putting them to work in jobs that developed few skills and offered little or no long-term career opportunities. Other examples included organizations that charged ex-offenders for light-touch services. At best, these providers might play a "baby-sitting" role while offering ex-offenders few quality

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services. At worst, these providers could simply be taking advantage of a marginal population and putting them in damaging or negative environments.

The Services Provided by Criminal Justice Partners

Excluded from the discussion of alternative providers above are two types of services: (1) those delivered to offenders prior to their release from prison and (2) those received by ex-offenders through their supervision under probation or parole. These two sets of services were not alternatives to RExO because they typically did not offer a comparable slate of core RExO services. Nevertheless, both sets of services are important to understand insofar as they were available to both program and control groups equally. Understanding them also helps better define the baseline of services upon which RExO programs were trying to improve. These two sets of services are finally important to understand since both were heavily responsible for referring ex-offenders to post-release programs—provided by both RExO grantees and alternative providers—in the first place.

Interview respondents in several grantee communities discussed the pre-release services in their area. These services varied somewhat in intensity and quality, both across areas and within each area, but the norm for these programs was that they began about six months prior to release and included several services similar to what ex-offenders find in post-release programs. Many times these services included coursework consisting of several days or weeks of classes along the lines of a work-readiness and life skills class. In Iowa, for instance, offenders could enroll in a life skills class operated by local community colleges. Other times, such as with the county jail program in Egg Harbor, these services included a staff of counselors who provide case management services to offenders as they neared release. In addition, quite a few other organizations, including many alternative providers and RExO grantees, received grants to provide pre-release services.

As discussed in Chapter VII, many probation and parole programs faced budget cuts and other pressures that have forced them to limit the intensity, scope, or enrollment of the services they provide. Still, probation and parole officers played an important role in helping ex-offenders access services.[44] They typically made referrals to various programs, like RExO, as appropriate. One respondent discussed how in Des Moines, parole and probation staff members used various assessment tools to help identify participant needs for support, job search, and mental health services. Respondents in several other communities discussed how probation and parole officers

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[44] In fact, Texas recently passed a new piece of legislation (HB 1711) that establishes a comprehensive re-entry program for the state. Texas State Legislature online.
http://www.legis.state.tx.us/billlookup/History.aspx?LegSess=81R&Bill=HB1711

planned organization resource fairs and required newly released ex-offenders to attend, giving them an opportunity to hear about programs and services that address employment, housing, and other needs they had. Sometimes probation and parole officers even provided more direct services to ex-offenders. In Baton Rouge, for example, these officers were able to provide some emergency funding for housing. In Tucson, respondents discussed how such officers might have helped ex-offenders secure the various forms of documentation they needed, such as IDs or birth certificates.

That said, not all parole and probation departments or officers were helpful. One case manager spoke about a corrections staff member who actively encouraged ex-offenders to find jobs on their own rather than enroll in re-entry programs. Less direct, and more typical, were cases in which parole and probation services were simply too light to provide any real assistance. As discussed above, many departments experienced cuts accompanied by increasingly heavy caseloads. Even if probation and parole officers wanted to make referrals, they did not always have the time or opportunity to be useful in this regard. Furthermore, given that they must prioritize tracking participants and ensuring that no violations occur, these tasks often took a back seat, even if getting ex-offenders enrolled in various reentry programs might have otherwise helped.

Summary

Several findings emerged about the various alternative services within grantee communities that were available to control-group members and RExO participants alike during the evaluation year.

- **Alternative provider services—other than those involving mentoring—were readily available.** The research team identified 97 providers across the 24 grantee communities that offered at least one core RExO service. Of these 97, 81 offered work readiness training, 81 offered job search and placement assistance, and 71 offered case management services. Each grantee community had between two and eight such providers, and each of these three services was available through some combination of alternative providers in every grantee community, with many communities having had more than one of each. However, only 20 alternative service providers offered mentoring services and only 15 grantee communities had such a provider. The relative lack of mentoring services seemed to indicate that mentoring services are inherently challenging to operate.

- **Alternative provider services, with a few exceptions, were accessible**. Respondents noted that alternative provider services generally were visible to the ex-offender population, were located where ex-offenders could reach them relatively easily, used eligibility criteria that left them sufficiently open to those eligible for RExO, and had sufficient capacity to serve control-group members. That said, respondents in a few grantee communities raised concerns about the

ability of some alternative providers in their communities to satisfy all of these criteria of accessibility.

- **Within most communities, the quality of alternative provider services was roughly similar to or slightly lower than the quality of similar services offered by the RExO program.** Service quality, assessed in this chapter, is based on measurements of the intensity of the services offered and on the views of respondents within grantee communities. The research team found that core services offered by alternative providers were slightly less intense than the same services offered by the grantee organizations within the same communities. Respondents noted that alternative provider services may have been of lesser quality if they offered a less-than-comprehensive package of services to ex-offenders, had less overall funding, offered less individualized attention to participants, or used questionable practices.

This chapter also considered two types of services that were not strictly alternatives—since they were accessed by both program- and control-group members—but which affected the success of these ex-offenders: services ex-offenders received either prior to release from prison or those they received post-release, under supervision by a probation or parole officer. Both types of services appeared to have been available in all grantee communities with pre-release services, and they often included a slate of services similar to what ex-offenders found in post-release programs. Supervision by probation and parole officers tended to involve monitoring more than actual service delivery, especially in times of tighter budgets. However, respondents in some communities did note that supervision provided ex-offenders with a higher level of access to services.

When it comes to the study, the role of alternative provider services in grantee communities remains unclear. Control-group members appeared to have the opportunity to pursue some programs roughly comparable to those of RExO in most grantee communities, which could diminish the overall measured impact of participating in RExO. The important question, then, is empirical: whether control-group members accessed these services. That question is one the research team will address in the Impact Report.

IX.   SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This *Interim Report* presents findings on the implementation of the Re-integration of Ex-Offenders program by the 24 grantees awarded funding during the fifth year of the program (April 2010 to March 2011). In particular, this report gives special attention to the RA evaluation conducted during this fifth year and the implementation challenges it posed for grantees. Previous chapters have described the characteristics of the grantees, outlined grant budgets and staffing, summarized the services that grantees provided, analyzed the partnerships that grantees developed, and discussed the community context and alternative services available to ex-offenders within the 24 RExO grantee communities. This final chapter summarizes the key findings of the previous chapters, identifies some common challenges faced and successes realized by grantees, and outlines the next steps of the evaluation.

Key Findings

Over the course of five years, the 24 RExO grantees made significant strides in implementing their RExO programs. They successfully mobilized community partners to participate in program activities, leveraged existing organizational resources to strengthen their RExO programs, and provided much-needed employment, case management and mentoring services, as well as other supportive services, to thousands of ex-offenders. These grantees also successfully implemented a RA study of over 4,600 ex-offenders, which is intended to contribute substantially to the understanding of the impacts of workforce-based reentry programs for ex-offenders. The following sections summarize the key findings from each chapter.

Community Context

RExO programs operated in diverse community contexts that reveal the challenges and opportunities for ex-offenders. Understanding this context is key to contextualizing the findings highlighted in this report and in the Impact Report that will summarize program impacts.

- **Ex-offenders, both in the program and control group, faced similar challenges.** They confronted barriers, such as substance abuse and low levels of education, which impeded their ability to find work and successfully re-integrate

into society. Furthermore, ex-offenders confronted employer biases, formal hiring policies, and less formal hiring practices that limited their employment opportunities. To the extent that ex-offenders found work, opportunities came from within industries offering low-skill, low-paying jobs, and the employers tended to be smaller, local employers who often had experience with ex-offenders.

- **The economic downturn placed additional pressures on ex-offenders.** Unemployment rates in grantee communities were high. According to grantee staff, employers that previously hired ex-offenders subsequently had an abundant and overqualified pool of candidates vying for fewer jobs and were less willing to hire individuals with criminal backgrounds. In addition, cuts to state and local budgets reduced other services that could help ex-offenders smoothly re-enter society.

Grantee Administration

Overall, grantees or lead agencies represented a diverse group of organizations such as national non-profits, FBCOs, community health organizations, and local or regional non-profits. Many of these organizations were large and resource rich, while others were small. The evaluation identified several key characteristics about the lead agencies that served as RExO grantees.

- **The lead agencies were well-established organizations prior to receiving the RExO grant.** The vast majority of the lead agencies had been in operation for decades, with most organizations having existed for well over 20 years prior to receiving the RExO grant. The long duration of the grantees' presence in their communities appeared to have influenced their ability to leverage community partnerships and reach a large number of eligible applicants.

- **The lead agencies offered many other services and programs in addition to RExO.** Lead agencies offered anywhere from three to more than 30 programs including the RExO program. As a result, RExO programs leveraged existing resources to provide wraparound services, such as housing, substance abuse counseling and treatment, and others.

- **The grantees hired an aggregate total of 140 FTEs at the time of the first site visit (spring 2010) and employed about 135 FTEs at the time of the second site visit (fall 2010) to manage and deliver services.** Most of the staff members that were hired were case managers, followed by administrative staff and employment services staff. Programs hired staff with diverse backgrounds and characteristics, some of whom had long histories in working with ex-offenders and other disadvantaged populations.

- **RExO programs were highly valued within grantee organizations.** Even when RExO programs accounted for only a small portion of the overall operating budget for grantees, grantees considered these programs valuable. Many programs influenced the ways in which grantees structured other services within the lead agency. Staff members at several sites, for example, decided to

incorporate work readiness training, started under RExO, into other programs they offered.

Intake/Recruitment/Assessment

Grantees experienced a decline in enrollment in Year 5, in part because of the RA study and also due to overall decline in funds seen from previous years. To address this challenge, grantees worked closely with the site liaisons to strengthen their outreach and recruitment efforts. Some of the specific strategies that programs used included the following:

- **Grantees intensified their outreach and recruitment efforts to reach a larger pool of applicants.** To address the dip in enrollment numbers, grantees reached out to partners to increase referrals and develop concrete recruitment strategies to identify applicants. Some of the more noteworthy outreach strategies included making presentations in prisons, at halfway houses, at local shelters, and even co-locating staff at probation/parole offices.

- **Grantees adjusted their intake and enrollment procedures in order to implement the RA process.** Both at the beginning of Year 5 and somewhat into the process, some grantees moved RA forward in their intake and enrollment process, engaging in fewer steps to screen candidates for suitability and willingness to participate.[45] A few grantees experienced some difficulties with these changes while others managed to work in adequate suitability screening that occurred in a more limited fashion than it had previously.

- **Overall, grantees were able to meet recruitment targets established for the evaluation.** Most grantees met or exceeded the recruitment target of 200 participants either with their pre-existing strategies or by adopting some of the efforts described above. A few grantees did experience continued recruitment difficulties and, despite their best effort, did not meet the recruitment target.

Random Assignment

Nearly all the grantees implemented the RA process smoothly, though the exact point at which participants were assigned varied across the grantees.

- One grantee implemented RA prior to participants being released from incarceration.

- The remaining grantees assigned participants only after they had made contact with the grantee post-release, though there were two general models of this approach:

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[45] Although all study participants will be included in the analysis, we plan to examine whether there is variation in impacts between those who entered the study earlier (i.e., when some grantees were using heavier screening) and later (when some implemented more intensive screening) to examine whether this affected the net impact of the program.

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- Some grantees randomly assigned participants in conjunction with an orientation to the program at an initial meeting with the participant.

- Others randomly assigned only after some screening and assessments were conducted to ensure the participant was a good fit for the program and was sufficiently motivated to participate in it. Many of these grantees later scaled back their screening process because they were struggling to meet their enrollment targets.

A total of 4,660 individuals was assigned either to the program group (2,804, or 60.2 percent) or the control group (1,856, or 39.8 percent) for this study. Fifteen of the grantees reached their target of 200 participants (and an additional three reached at least 190), while only three grantees enrolled fewer than 150 participants. An analysis of the characteristics of the two groups suggests that there were very few differences between them, indicating that the RA process was implemented smoothly and operated as intended.

RExO Services

A number of core services were available to RExO participants, including case management, employment services, and mentoring. These services were usually available in-house. In sites with limited capacity and expertise however, some of the services were delivered by contracted partners. In general, grantees paid special attention to the participants' multiple needs and barriers to design their service plans and leveraged community resources and support from the lead agency to augment the service mix.

- **Case management support was a core strength of the RExO program**. Case managers served as an important glue that connected participants to essential services that could help them succeed. Recognizing the value of case managers, programs invested heavily in them, and hired more than 60 FTEs. Having a sufficient number of case managers ensured that caseloads were kept low and case managers could provide individualized support.

- **Work readiness training was a prominent feature within the participants' service mix.** Nearly all programs offered work readiness training as the core training activity. The intensity and duration of this training varied widely by grantee but the content of this training was very similar across grantees, including résumé development, interviewing skills, and job search strategies.

- **Seven of the grantees offered transitional jobs as an opportunity for ex-offenders to earn immediate income and gain valuable work experience that was often missing from their résumé.** These positions were not usually meant to lead to permanent positions, though some grantees secured employer commitments to hire participants should they succeed in their positions. Typically, the positions were in retail, food service, construction, and manufacturing industries.

- **There was a wide range of mentoring approaches among the RExO grantees.** Approximately two-thirds of program participants engaged in mentoring activities (62.5 percent). Grantees offered a mix of individual and group mentoring activities, though the vast majority of them focused primarily on group mentoring. Group mentoring consisted of support groups, social events, and supplemental work readiness and life skills training. Program staff noted that ex-offenders preferred group mentoring because it did not require consistent participation.

RExO Partnerships

Establishing partnerships was key to the programs' ability to provide wraparound services. Grantees successfully linked with a wide range of partners, using formal and informal mechanisms to connect to them.

- **Grantees relied on a network of partnerships to fill gaps in their capacity to meet the needs of program participants**. These relationships may have been formal, contractual relationships, or informal relationships. Through partnerships, grantees were able to offer a range of services sufficient to meet the broad needs of their clients, increase the likelihood for future funding by expanding their capacity, strengthen their standing in the community, and enrich their own services by coming to know better their own clients.

- **Grantees relied on one of three formal sub-grantee partnership models to deliver core RExO services.** Half used no sub-grantees. Six grantees had tightly coordinated sub-grantee relationships, defined by co-located staff, frequent opportunities for information-sharing, and other systems designed to increase transparency and communication. The other six grantees had sub-grantees that operated somewhat independently of the grantee and one another. Though no clear qualitative differences emerged in the effectiveness of these competing models, this will be examined as part of the impact analysis.

- **Grantees leveraged various informal partnerships to supplement RExO services.** Grantees relied on less formal partnerships, which could range from loose attachments to quite strong relationships, to provide services such as substance abuse treatment, housing services, mental health services, health care, transportation, etc.

- **Strong partnerships shared a number of common practices and included links with partners that shared common goals and objectives with the RExO program**. Some of the strongest partnerships included those that maintained frequent contact, had a history of collaboration, were bound by memoranda of understanding or contracts, and were located physically close to one another. Weak partnerships however, lacked these attributes and in some cases a potential partner may have been hesitant to serve ex-offenders.

- **Partnerships with criminal justice organizations strengthened RExO services**. These partnerships included those with probation and parole offices, transitional or halfway houses and the courts. When strong, these partners could

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refer participants to RExO, enhance communication and coordination with program staff, and enhance participants' access to additional services.

Alternatives to RExO

An analysis of the available alternative programs in the 24 communities indicates that RExO programs generally did not operate in communities that were starved for services. Specifically, key findings included the following:

- **Grantee communities offered many alternatives to RExO.** In every grantee community, ex-offenders could find some combination of work readiness training, job search and placement assistance and case management services for ex-offenders through providers other than the RExO grantee. With some limitations, these services appeared to be accessible to ex-offenders and of roughly comparable, or only slightly lesser, quality than those offered by grantees.

- **Mentoring services were less frequently available than employment services and case management**. Mentoring services were the exception to the general rule of available services, and appeared to be much less available in grantee communities other than through the RExO program.

Successes and Challenges

These findings suggest that grantees achieved a number of significant accomplishments and also experienced a range of challenges throughout the life of the grant.

Successes

- **Grantees served over 17,000 participants in Years 1 to 4 of the grant and an additional 2,804 as part of the RA study in Year 5**. These programs were thus able to support a significant number of people in re-entering society.

- **Grantees as a whole successfully implemented a large-scale RA study**, enrolling 4,660 individuals. They also adapted recruitment and intake procedures as needed to implement the study.

- **Grantees offered a diverse mix of services that were intensive and comprehensive.** The core services that made up the RExO program—case management, employment services and mentoring—allowed participants flexibility in choosing the services that best met their skills and needs. In addition, the overall funding levels allowed these programs to offer a level of intensity and comprehensiveness not easily found in their communities, at least in a single location. Combined with services grantees were able to leverage from partners, RExO offered participants a relatively comprehensive package of services.

Challenges

- **The RA study appeared to have affected recruitment and enrollment.** Respondents noted that applicants may have been afraid of being turned away

from receiving services and as a result, fewer of them sought services at RExO programs. Subsequently, enrollment numbers decreased, requiring grantees to develop intentional and focused recruitment efforts to reach their enrollment goals.

- **Grantees experienced difficulty implementing the mentoring program.** Mentoring services were new to most grantees and they were difficult to implement. One of the most challenging aspects of the mentoring program was recruiting volunteer mentors, many of whom were reluctant to work with ex-offenders. Because of this challenge, the vast majority of programs offered group mentoring services, which resembled many other services already available through the programs, such as peer support groups and workshops on work readiness training.

- **Participants' barriers to employment posed a serious challenge to placing them in jobs.** Grantee staff members noted repeatedly that barriers such as lack of education, lack of work experience, unstable or transitional housing, transportation limitations, restrictions on movement due to terms of parole, and substance abuse issues, among others, presented the largest barriers to participants finding employment.

- **Many employers were reluctant to hire ex-offenders.** A major recurring challenge for the RExO programs was that employers were hesitant to hire ex-offenders due to their criminal backgrounds. Grantee staff members felt that this perspective came from prejudice and lack of interaction with ex-offenders. As RExO job developers continued to work with employers to open opportunities for RExO participants, they frequently combated biases about ex-offenders' skills and work ethic, suggesting that employing well-trained job developers may lead to better employment outcomes for offenders.

- **Even though grantees sought to sustain the program and the RExO services, many of them were unable to find alternative funding sources to replace RExO by the time the program was slated to end.** The funding climate was difficult for ex-offenders, according to program staff. As a result, they explored multiple options, such as local, state, and Federal funding that would sustain some of the RExO services. While some grantees were successful, others were still struggling to find new funders when their RExO funding ceased.

- **The impact analysis will not be of a single program model.** Given that the services offered by grantees and their partners varied substantially, and the point of RA varied across grantees as well, what constitutes the program varied across sites. As a result, the analysis of impacts will be of the RExO funding stream rather than of a single program model.

- **The service contrast varied substantially across sites, which may affect the impact analysis.** Because both the services provided by RExO grantees and those available through alternative providers varied across the 24 sites, the contrast in services between program and control group members likely varied as well. Depending on the extent of this contrast, it may have implications for the impact analysis. Though this was known prior to the onset of RA, the

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implementation study has shown that this service contrast indeed differs markedly across sites.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This report provided some context for the Impact Report by presenting information about the labor market situation in the communities in which programs operated, the major barriers facing ex-offenders, the organizational features of the RExO programs, the services available through the programs, and the services available in the community. The report also discussed the strategies that grantees used to leverage the resources available through key partners to deliver services to program participants. Further, this report highlighted some positive features of the RExO program, such as the presence of additional resources at many program sites to enhance services for ex-offenders, the intensive and committed case management support to ex-offenders, and the diverse range of partnerships that were developed as a result of the RExO grant. Grantees also made a good-faith effort to tailor services to ex-offenders so that they could maximize their ability to succeed in the program and workplace. By examining participants' barriers at intake and determining the most appropriate service plan at the onset, grantees were able to refer participants to supportive services such as substance abuse treatment, provide work readiness training, or paid work experience opportunities immediately after enrollment. These programmatic features likely influenced the pathways that ex-offenders took as they sought new opportunities.

Several important challenges remained for program participants, however. The end of the RExO grant meant that some programs were unable to continue to sustain their program models at full capacity (or at all). This meant that in the vast majority of sites, RExO services were scaled back or ended significantly due to decreased funding. Grantee staff also reported that the national recession affected the participants' employment outcomes. This particular challenge likely exacerbated the relative weakness of RExO programs in their focus on job development. Too often, RExO programs did not provide adequate support to the job development function—in both the training available to job developers and the staff support to ensure that this function was adequately funded. Future funding for programs of this type could better emphasize the role of job developers to ensure that that ex-offenders get the support they need to compete with other job applicants in the marketplace.

In the subsequent months, the evaluation team will conduct a survey of all participants to document the outcomes they achieved in the months since they enrolled in the study. Additionally, the team will collect administrative data on criminal justice outcomes for participants for this same period. These data will allow the evaluation to examine outcomes on service receipt, employment, earnings, recidivism, and other key indicators, such as health,

mental health, substance abuse, and childcare support. Results from the analysis of these data will be presented in the Impact Report, which is to be submitted to ETA in late 2013.

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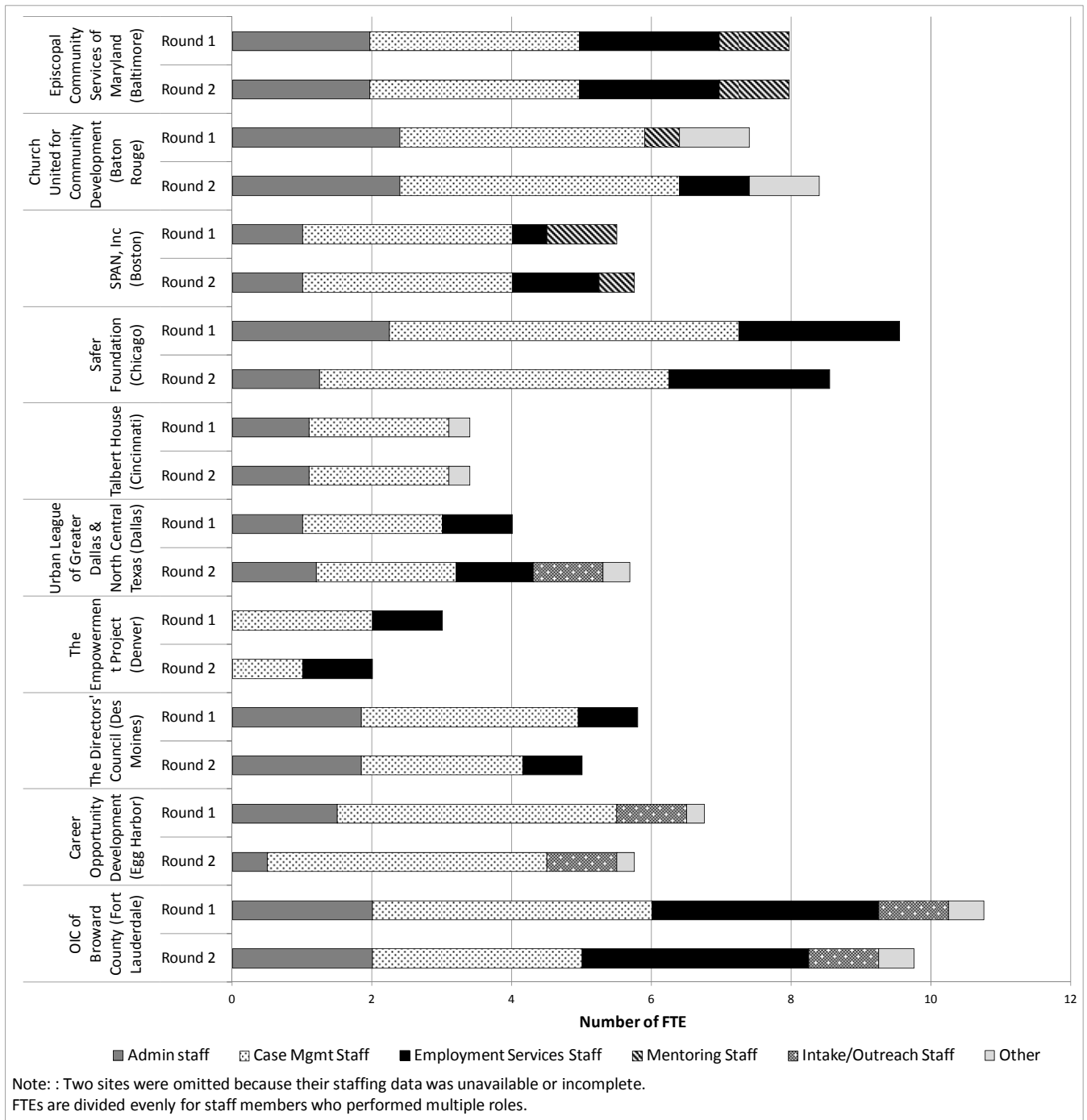
Appendix A:
Tenure of RExO Coordinators

Grantee Name	City, State	Number of Years Working on RExO
Episcopal Community Services of Maryland	Baltimore, MD	5
Church United for Community Development	Baton Rouge, LA	Less than 6 months
Span, Inc.	Boston, MA	3
Safer Foundation	Chicago, IL	3
Talbert House	Cincinnati, OH	3
Urban League of Greater Dallas & North Central Texas	Dallas, TX	2
The Empowerment Program	Denver, CO	13
The Directors' Council	Des Moines, IA	4
Career Opportunity Development	Egg Harbor, NJ	5
OIC of Broward County	Fort Lauderdale, FL	1.5
Fresno Career Development Institute	Fresno, CA	3
Community Partners in Action	Hartford, CT	2
Connections to Success	Kansas City, MO	7
Odyssey House Louisiana	New Orleans, LA	5
Connection Training Services	Philadelphia, PA	3
AWEE	Phoenix, AZ	3
OLSHA	Pontiac, MI	3
SE Works	Portland, OR	1
MAAP, Inc.	Sacramento, CA	2
Goodwill Industries	San Antonio, TX	8
Metro United Methodist Urban Ministries	San Diego, CA	5
POCAAN	Seattle, WA	3
St. Patrick Center	St. Louis, MO	2
Primavera Foundation	Tucson, AZ	4

Note: Data as of Round 1 site visit (summer 2010).

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Appendix B provides a detailed description of the number of staff available in each RExO program in the following staffing categories: (1) administrative staff, (2) case management staff, (3) employment services staff, (4) mentoring staff, (5) intake/outreach staff, and (6) other. The gray bars in the graph depict the number of staff in each of these categories, ranging from .5 FTE to 11 FTE.

Appendix B:
Allocation of Staffing Resources by Job Category by Grantees (Baltimore- Fort Lauderdale)

Note: : Two sites were omitted because their staffing data was unavailable or incomplete.
FTEs are divided evenly for staff members who performed multiple roles.

Legend: ■ Admin staff ▦ Case Mgmt Staff ■ Employment Services Staff ▨ Mentoring Staff ▦ Intake/Outreach Staff ▢ Other

Appendix B:
Allocation of Staffing Resources by Job Category by Grantee (Hartford-Tucson)

Number of FTE

Legend: ▨ Admin staff · ▢ Case Mgmt Staff · ■ Employment Services Staff · ▨ Mentoring Staff · ▨ Intake/Outreach Staff · ☐ Other

Note: : Two sites were omitted because their staffing data was unavailable or incomplete.
FTEs are divided evenly for staff members who performed multiple roles.
[1] Intake staff and substance abuse counselor were funded by partner organizations.

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