



Partners for Reentry Opportunities
in Workforce Development

Partnership Development for PROWD Grantees: Lessons Learned from the Federal Interagency Reentry Council

PROWD grantees are part of a historic partnership between the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Department of Labor (DOL). The Departments embarked on the first-of-its-kind collaboration to provide job skills training and individualized employment and reentry plans for people incarcerated in Bureau of Prisons (BOP) facilities. The agencies will work together to provide a seamless transition for incarcerated individuals to employment and reentry support upon release. This landmark initiative is based on PROWD grantees developing effective partnerships with BOP facilities in their states, state agencies, educational institutions, training organizations, and other organizations in the community that provide much-needed support services for successful reentry.

The complex issue of how to assist formerly incarcerated individuals returning to our communities is not new. In January 2011, then U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder established a Cabinet-level, Federal Interagency Reentry Council, (FIRC or the Council), representing a significant executive branch commitment to coordinating reentry efforts and advancing effective reentry policies. From 2011 to 2016, the FIRC worked together to reduce recidivism and improve employment, education, housing, and health, for formerly incarcerated individuals, and child welfare outcomes for their children.

Comprised of more than 20 federal departments and agencies, the Council coordinated and leveraged existing federal resources targeted to reentry to provide visibility to programs and policies that work; and reduced the policy barriers to successful reentry.

Participating Departments and Agencies

U.S. Department of Justice	White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships
U.S. Department of Interior	Office of Personnel Management
U.S. Department of Agriculture	Office of Management and Budget
U.S. Department of Labor	Internal Revenue Service
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services	Federal Trade Commission
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development	U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness

U.S. Department of Transportation	U.S. Small Business Administration
U.S. Department of Education	Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs	U.S. Department of Commerce
Office of National Drug Control Policy	Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
U.S. Social Security Administration	Corporation for National and Community Service
Domestic Policy Council	U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

FIRC was recognized in a 2014 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report as one of four model federal interagency collaborations. The Council's collective work at the federal level has served as a model for many states, several of which have started similar councils. In the Managing for Results: Implementation Approaches used to Enhance Collaboration in Interagency Groups, GAO identified several approaches to addressing critical considerations for implementing interagency collaborative councils. These considerations include defining outcomes, measuring performance, and ensuring accountability; establishing leadership approaches; and using resources, such as funding, staff, and technology.

The chart below identifies the practices identified by GAO in alignment with practices that should be adopted by PROWD grantees to help enhance and sustain collaboration:

Practices Identified by GAO	Application to PROWD Grantees
Define and articulate a common outcome.	Grantees should develop a mission statement reflecting their partners' values and community interests.
Establish mutually reinforcing or joint strategies.	The PROWD partnership should identify strategies for moving forward, such as a regular meeting schedule, conducting a resource analysis, and developing a communication plan.
Identify and address needs by leveraging resources.	Grantees should conduct a resource analysis and document the available resources of each partner to identify resource gaps as well as potential partners to fill those gaps.

Agree on roles and responsibilities.	PROWD partners should identify the roles and responsibilities of each partner or partner committee. Use this and the resource analysis to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or agreement.
Establish compatible policies, procedures, and other means to operate across agency boundaries.	The PROWD partnership should develop a method to communicate information, including policies and procedures across agency lines.
Develop mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on results.	Collect data to monitor program activities and include in quarterly reports. PROWD grantees should also use these data for continuous quality improvement.
Reinforce agency accountability for collaborative efforts through agency plans and reports.	PROWD should develop an implementation plan for each stage of the grant and assign partners responsible for ensuring the success of each activity or task. Establish a mechanism for regular partner reporting and a method of sharing information across all partners.

NOTE: The FIRC quickly developed a mission statement encompassing its partners' values and eliciting the community's support. Creating a strategic mission statement to guide the work and support partnership growth is vital to the PROWD initiative. PROWD grantees should also consider mirroring the composition of FIRC on the state level and broadening its membership to include state-wide community organizations. Only a strong network of partners can provide the holistic approach needed to assist our returning citizens.

The FIRC recognized the complex challenges facing individuals leaving the criminal justice system – securing housing, employment, and health care, among others. Several FIRC agencies dedicated funding streams to support reentry activities. With reentry funding awarded competitively and in high demand, FIRC agencies worked together to improve alignment, coordination, and transparency. Early on, the FIRC agencies inventoried the scope of federal resources devoted to reentry. From this analysis, the National Reentry Resource Center, funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), developed an interactive map that identified federal reentry funding streams and grant awards in each state. This publicly available tool allowed federal staff and local stakeholders to locate reentry resources in their jurisdictions and coordinate locally at a much faster pace. Agencies also shared reentry funding announcements and technical assistance opportunities. Additionally, FIRC agencies coordinated programmatic and research efforts, increasing the use of evidence-based practices across the federal government. This collaborative approach allowed agencies to draw on the diverse expertise of FIRC members and consider a range of disciplines when developing interventions.

Interventions focused on employment and reentry were increasingly informed by the recidivism reduction literature and workforce development best practices. FIRC was able to advance the reentry agenda, dispel myths, clarify policies, and provide visibility to programs and policies that work. Council agencies developed more than two dozen "Reentry Myth Busters." These fact sheets were designed to clarify existing federal policies that affect formerly incarcerated individuals and their families in areas such as public housing, nutrition assistance, employment, parental rights, Medicaid suspension/termination, voting rights, and more. The Myth Busters helped individuals, states, and reentry organizations better understand federal laws and regulations, providing clarity for the misconceptions that could create unnecessary barriers to reentering individuals. FIRC also raised public awareness through initiatives like the White House Reentry Champions of Change events, stakeholder listening sessions, and employer roundtables. During this period, DOJ designated National Reentry Week a week in April 2016. During the inaugural National Reentry Week, DOJ and FIRC agencies sponsored over 550 events designed to improve reentry outcomes and raise awareness of the importance of successful reentry.

The FIRC enacted policy changes that reduced barriers to employment, education, health care, and housing for those with criminal records.

- The EEOC issued guidance regarding the appropriate use of arrest and conviction records in employment decisions under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- HUD issued fair housing guidance, explaining when barriers to housing for those with a criminal record violate the antidiscrimination provisions of the Fair Housing Act.
- The SBA expanded its Microloan eligibility rules, and the DOJ directed all its components to consider collateral consequences when proposing any new regulation or guidance.
- OPM proposed a "Ban the Box" rule change, which modified the hiring process for many federal jobs by delaying inquiries into an applicant's criminal history until a conditional offer is presented.
- The Department of Education, in collaboration with DOJ, launched the Second Chance Pell pilot program allowing an estimated 12,000 eligible incarcerated Americans to receive Pell Grants and access postsecondary education and training programs.
- HHS issued new Medicaid guidance to assist states in facilitating access to healthcare coverage and treatment for specific justice-involved populations.

Federal agencies should share information with one another, field offices, and the wide range of stakeholders. Alignment at the federal level is a critical first step. FIRC recognized the importance of working effectively with government and nongovernmental organizations at the national, regional, state, and local levels. The PROWD initiative is a prime example of these organizations working together at the state and local levels.

Through FIRC, DOL, and DOJ were able to collaborate on grant development and assist with successful implementation. Prior to writing the LEAP and Training to Work grants, DOJ provided information on their processes and protocols, which shaped the implementation process for these grants. Additionally, DOJ provided subject matter experts to assist DOL grantees in

understanding the operations of their facilities. This partnership made the implementation of these grants effective and efficient. Additionally, DOL and DOJ jointly funded the National Clean Slate Clearinghouse, a 50-state inventory of record clearance policies. This marked the first combined funding on a project from these two agencies.

Resources:

[Federal Interagency Reentry Council: A Record of Progress and a Roadmap for the Future](#)

This report outlines specific agency actions (development of training, technical assistance, and strategic communications) to ensure federal staff and state, local, and community stakeholders know the tools available and use them to implement robust reentry policies and programs.

[Federal Interagency Reentry Council](#)

In January 2011, then U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder established a Cabinet-level federal interagency reentry council, representing a significant executive branch commitment to coordinating reentry efforts and advancing effective reentry policies. The Federal Interagency Reentry Council worked together to reduce recidivism and improve employment, education, housing, health, and child welfare outcomes.

[Managing for Results: Implementation Approaches Used to Enhance Collaboration in Interagency Groups \(GAO\)](#)

GAO selected four interagency groups that met its critical practices for enhancing and sustaining collaboration to learn about the approaches they used and found successful. These groups addressed issues of homelessness, reentry of formerly incarcerated individuals, rental housing policy, and the education of military-dependent students.