

Attachment 3: Frontline Staff Focus Group Protocol, Round 1

Linking to Employment Activities Pre-Release (LEAP)
Evaluation

Site Visit Protocols

December 11, 2015

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PROTOCOL FOR FRONTLINE STAFF FOCUS GROUPS – ROUND 1

Instructions to interviewers: Bullets below each question represent probes for important details; depending on how well you are doing on time, try to make sure respondents touch on each of these issues. Text in [] corresponds to sections of write-up template.

Part I. Setup Activities (15 minutes)

1. As participants enter the room, ask them their name and write it next to one of the IDs in your list of MPRIDs.
2. Provide them with a blank staff information form that has the same MPRID at the top. Ask them to complete the staff information form, and tell them that information in the form will be kept private and separate from their name.
3. If anyone declines to fill out the form, write “DECLINE” at the top of the form and keep it separate from the unused forms.
4. When they hand back their completed form, let them know the discussion will be starting in a few minutes.
5. Cross out the IDs in your list that were not used.

Part II. Introduction (5 minutes)

Good afternoon. My name is _____, and this is my colleague _____ and we are from Mathematica Policy Research/Social Policy Research Associates. We are part of an independent research team that is studying the pre-employment services being provided in your county through the local jail as well as the American Job Centers (AJC) as part of the [Program Name] program. The study is on behalf of the U.S. Department of Labor. Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this conversation. Your participation is very important to the study.

To help us better understand how the program is working, we would like to ask you some questions about your experiences. Your responses will be kept private and used only for research purposes. Our team will use your responses in conjunction with other sources of information to identify themes to describe the overall experience of implementing the program. The audio recording of the discussion is just to help us remember what you say in your own words and will not be shared with anyone outside our research team. **[Placeholder –insert into text once we have received CoC approval:** To further protect your privacy, the study team has obtained a Certificate of Confidentiality from the National Institutes of Health, which allows researchers to refuse to hand over identifying information in response to legal demands.] We want to reiterate that being part of this discussion is up to you, and you may choose not to answer a question if you wish. Being part of this discussion will not affect your employment or your involvement with the [Program Name] program. I also ask that you not share what you hear today with anyone outside of the group.

I am going to moderate the discussion. It is really important for everyone to speak up so we can have a lively and informative discussion. It will also be helpful if you speak one at a time, so

everyone has a chance to talk. I will try to be mindful of the time and may need to keep the discussion moving to make sure we cover all the topics.

We have about one and a half hours for our discussion. Do you have any questions before we begin recording?

Ok, we're going to turn on the audio recorder now.

Part III. Participant Background (5 minutes) [A2]

1. First, I'd like to ask each of you to introduce yourselves. Let's start to my right, and please tell me:
 - your name,
 - your role in the [Program Name] program,
 - what organization you work for,
 - whether you have other responsibilities beyond those for LEAP.

Part IV. Participant Context (5 minutes) [A3, A4]

I'd like to begin by talking about the population that you are serving in the program for a few minutes.

2. What do you feel are the biggest barriers for the formerly incarcerated in your community to avoid recidivism?
Probes: (make sure to probe for bolded ones)
 - Mental health or substance abuse problems
 - Lack of stable housing
 - Limited work experience
 - Lack of employer willingness to hire ex-offenders
 - Lack of education
 - Lack of transportation
 - Lack of family support
 - Lack of health care and poor physical health
 - High child support payments
 - Negative peer and neighborhood influences
 - Other barriers

3. What are the most important employment skills that this population need to succeed?

Probes:

- Basic literacy and numeracy
- Vocational or technical skills
- Interviewing and interpersonal skills
- Credentials, including GED
- Job search skills (for example, networking, applying for jobs, finding the right match)
- Job retention skills (for example, good work ethic, timeliness, working in a team)

Part V. Working with Partners (20 minutes) [B]

Let's talk about your collaboration with partner organizations as part of [Program Name], including law enforcement and corrections, AJC partners, partners that provide treatment or other services to participants, and partners that represent employer interests.

4. For your law enforcement and corrections partners,

- Do you meet with them regularly to discuss the program or participants?
- Do you feel that they share your goals for the program? Do they give the program the same level of priority?
- Does the active criminal justice status of participants create particular hurdles for service delivery?
- Are you able to get information on your participants from partners when necessary?
- Do the corrections staff help in making sure the program runs smoothly? If so, how? If not, why?
- How important is communication with probation and parole officers assigned to participants?

5. For those of you who provide services within the jail facility, how does being in the facility affect the services that you provide to participants?

- Is it difficult to schedule one-on-one meetings with clients or workshops?
- Do you have sufficient time to spend with clients either one-on-one or in groups?
- Do you have access to computers and the Internet? Are there any restrictions?
- Do participants have access to computers and the Internet? Are there any restrictions?

6. For partners that provide support services to participants, such as those located in the community AJC or elsewhere in the community, how do you coordinate with staff in these organizations?

- Do you have regular meetings? What do you usually discuss in those meetings?

- How are program guidelines or changes communicated to these partners?
7. Have you faced any challenges working with partners that provide services?
 - Are partners able to tailor services to the needs of justice involved individuals?
 - Do these partners have sufficient prior experience serving this population?
 - What has worked well to prevent or address challenges?
 8. For partners who are employers or represent employer interests,
 - To what extent do they provide jobs or workplace skill development opportunities to participants?
 - How are you engaging them to make the job market more favorable for former inmates?

Part VI. Staffing and Training (5 minutes) [A1]

I'd like to talk about staff supports.

9. Do you feel that there are enough staff to serve participants in the program?
 - How many participants do you have in your caseload? Do you work with any non-[Program Name] participants as well?
 - If you think more staff would be helpful, what role would these staff play?
10. Do you have previous experience working with the justice-involved population, or do you have personal experiences that have helped you relate to this population and their challenges?
 - If yes, please describe those experiences. How have they helped you in your role?
 - If no, do you find it difficult to relate to or form a rapport with the participants you work with? What has helped you overcome that difficulty?
11. What types of training have you received specific to your role in the program?
 - Are there any other kinds of training that you would like to receive? If yes, what kinds?
 - Are there other supports that would be helpful to you? If yes, what kinds?
12. What roles do your supervisors play in helping you provide services to participants?
 - Do you discuss individual cases with them?
 - Do they provide feedback on workshop delivery or client engagement?

Part VII. Enrollment and Participation (15 minutes) [D1]

I would like to spend a few minutes talking about participation in the program.

13. What type of inmates do you target for the program?
14. What recruitment strategies have been used?

- How do potential participants express interest in the program? Do they complete an application or other paperwork?
 - How do inmates typically view the program?
 - Do they have any concerns about participating? If yes, what are common concerns?
15. I'd like to talk about the enrollment process for the program. How do you determine whether someone is eligible for the program?
- Do you use a formal screening or eligibility determination process? If so, what does it entail? Do you use a criminogenic risk assessment?
 - How do you inform inmates if they are determined ineligible?
16. What happens after someone is determined eligible for the program (for example, intake)?
17. Have there been any challenges in getting participants to participate in LEAP before they are released? If yes, what are they?
- Are there certain types of participants that you believe are more motivated to participate, or who are more responsive to services?
18. Are there other non-LEAP employment or reentry services within the facility that participants can receive? If so, what are they and what proportion of LEAP participants receive them?

Part VIII. Pre- and Post-Release Services (20 minutes) [D, E]

Now I'd like to hear your perspectives on the services that are being provided through the program, both pre-release in the jail-AJC and post-release in the community AJCs that serve participants.

19. Are there specific services that everyone in the program receives pre-release (if so, which ones), or are they all tailored to individual needs? What is the typical sequence of pre-release services for a program participant?

Probe based on responses from LEAP project manager about services provided to participants. Possible probes:

- Career inventories
- Interest or skills assessments
- Labor market information
- Resume preparation
- Interviewing skills
- Job search assistance
- Assistance getting IDs
- Registration with employment database

- Job readiness/soft skills training
 - Remediation and GED preparation
 - Vocational training
20. How have you structured the “hand off” of participants at the time of release to the community AJC?
- Do the same LEAP staff provide both pre- and post-release services? If so, do you arrange for a specific meeting time with the participant in the community AJC shortly after release? How quickly do those meetings happen after release?
 - If different staff, how do you make the hand off? Do you introduce participants to the community-based staff before they are released? Do you set up an appointment time in the community AJC shortly after release? How quickly do those meetings happen after release?
21. What proportion of participants show up for their first appointment at the community AJC? For those who do not show up, what are the common reasons?
- Do you follow up with participants who miss appointments? How do you encourage them to participate?
 - Have there been any challenges in connecting participants to services post-release?
22. Are there specific services that everyone in the program receives post-release after a connection is made with the community AJC (if so, which ones), or are they all tailored to individual needs? What is the typical sequence of post-release services?

Probe based on responses from LEAP project manager about services provided to participants. Possible probes:

- Career inventories
- Interest or skills assessments
- Labor market information
- Resource rooms with computers, newspapers, and other job search resources
- Resume preparation
- Interviewing skills
- Job search assistance
- Assistance getting IDs
- Registration with employment database
- Job readiness/soft skills training
- Remediation and GED preparation
- Vocational training

- Job placement
 - On-the-job training
 - Work supports (clothes and tools)
 - Retention services
23. Does this sequence differ at all from how an AJC customer who has a criminal record but is not part of the [Program Name] program might usually access services?
24. How do you connect participants with other supports needed upon release, such as housing assistance, transportation assistance, mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, or access to public benefits?
- How many of these services does the LEAP program staff provide directly?
 - What proportion of participants need these services?
 - What proportion of participants actually receive them upon release?
25. How long do participants typically participate in the program, both pre- and post-release?
- How long are they supposed to participate ideally?
26. Do you enter participant and service receipt data into a data management system?
- If yes, how often do you enter data?
 - If no, how do you track information for your cases?
 - Do restrictions on computer use within the jail affect how participant and service receipt data are captured?
27. To what extent are you satisfied that the services being delivered by the program are the right “mix” in terms of intensity, the topics covered, and the time allocated?
- Which component or components of the program do you think are the most critical?

Part IX. Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned (15 minutes) [H]

We have a few minutes left, and I'd like you to think about the [Program Name] program as a whole, including both the services provided by the jail AJC, the community AJC, and partners.

28. What have been the biggest successes in starting up and carrying out the program?
- Successes in terms of grant partnerships?
 - Successes in terms of working with participants pre-release?
 - Successes in terms of linking participants to services post-release?
 - Successes in terms of working with participants post-release?
29. What have been the biggest challenges in starting up and carrying out the program?
- What was done to address these challenges?

- Have these challenges been addressed successfully?
30. What other challenges exist that will affect whether program participants are able to achieve positive employment and recidivism outcomes?
 - For example, a lack of housing, treatment, or other services in the community.
 31. What do you think could be improved about the program to better serve the justice-involved population?
 32. What lessons have you learned about serving this population that you think would be helpful for other jurisdictions that might want to implement a similar program?

[If time remains, ask:] Is there anything else about the program or your experience you would like to share that didn't come up already in the discussion?

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and ideas with us today. This discussion has been very helpful in learning more about the [Program Name] program and staff experiences. We appreciate your time.