

Attachment 4: Frontline Staff Focus Group Protocol,  
Round 2

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 2

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*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. This is the second round of interviews we are conducting in your site, so we may have spoken to some of you before. In this round, we will be focusing on the changes that have been made in the program since we last visited your site, and the major successes and challenges.

As before, 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 what is happening in 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,
  - how long you have been in this position, and
  - whether you have other responsibilities beyond those for this program.

### Part IV. Working with Partners (10 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.

2. *Summarize the role of the law enforcement and corrections partners based on what we know from the first round of visits, as well as the frequency and types of communication and coordination. Ask whether things are the same or have changed.*
  - Have there been any changes in how LEAP staff coordinate with their staff, such as more or less frequent meetings, changes in mode of communication, changes in process?
  - What precipitated these changes? Were the changes initiated by the LEAP program or by the partners?
3. *Summarize the role of partners that provide support services to participants, such as those located in the AJC or outside, based on what we know from the first round of visits, as well as the frequency and types of communication and coordination. Ask whether things are the same or have changed.*
  - Have there been any changes in how LEAP staff coordinate with their staff, such as more or less frequent meetings, changes in mode of communication, changes in process?
  - What precipitated these changes? Were the changes initiated by the LEAP program or by the partners?

4. *Summarize the role of partners who are employers or represent employer interests, based on what we know from the first round of visits, as well as the frequency and types of communication and coordination. Ask whether things are the same or have changed.*
  - Have there been any changes in the extent to which they provide jobs or skill development opportunities to participants?
  - What precipitated these changes? Were the changes initiated by the LEAP program or by the partners?
5. To what extent have you been able to develop a reliable network of employers to place participants from the program?
  - How many employers do you work with?
  - What different types of employers have been engaged? How do you engage them?
6. In what areas has your coordination with partners improved, and where is it still a challenge?
  - Your ability to operate within the jail facility?
  - The process of referrals to specialized service providers?
  - Your coordination of services across partners?
  - The ability of partners to tailor services for the justice-involved population?

#### Part V. Staffing and Training (10 minutes) [A1]

I'd like to talk about staff supports.

7. Do you feel that there are enough staff to serve participants in the program?
  - What is a typical caseload for the program?
  - What percentage of staff's caseloads are for [Program Name] versus other programs?
8. Has there been much turnover in frontline staff since the beginning of the program?
  - In what positions?
  - For what reasons did the positions turn over?
  - How long does it take to fill a vacant position?
  - What, if any, challenges have resulted from this turnover?
9. Have you received any training for your role in the program in the past year? If yes, what kinds?
  - Are there other kinds of training that would be useful to you? If yes, what kinds?
  - Are there other supports that would be helpful to you? If yes, what kinds?

10. *Summarize what we know from the first round of visits about how supervisors support frontline staff in the program. Ask if there have been any changes*
- What type of guidance does your supervisor provide to you regarding the program and service delivery?

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

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

11. Are you on track for meeting your enrollment targets for the program?
- How many individuals have you enrolled to date?
  - Has the pace and timing of enrollments unfolded as expected? If not, why?
  - Have there been any challenges in meeting targets? How have these challenges been addressed?
12. *Summarize what we know about recruitment strategies from the first round of visits. Ask if there have been any changes.*
- Have you changed who you target for the program?
  - Have the changes affected enrollment? If yes, how?
  - Why were these changes made?
13. *Summarize what we know about the process and criteria for eligibility for the program, based on the first round of visits. Ask if there have been any changes.*
- What has been the effect of these changes?
  - Why were these changes made?
14. *Summarize what we know about the process of intake for the program, based on the first round of site visits. Ask if there have been any changes.*
- What is the result of these changes?
  - Why were these changes made?
15. Have there been any challenges in getting participants to participate in pre-release services?
- How do participants generally feel about the program? Do they have concerns about participating? If yes, what are the common concerns?
  - Are there certain types of participants that you believe are more motivated to participate, or who are more responsive to services?

#### Part VII. Pre- and Post-release Services (15 minutes) [D, E]

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

16. *Summarize what we know about the services provided to participants pre-release, based on the first round of visits. Ask if there have been any changes.*
  - Have there been changes in what services are available, or who they are available for?
  - Have there been changes in when services are provided to participants, or in who provides the services?
  - Have there been changes in the content or intensity of services?
  - Why were these changes made?
17. *Summarize what we know from the first round of visits about how participants are “handed off” at the time of release to the community AJC. Ask if there have been any changes.*
  - Has the process changed?
  - Has there been a change in how quickly participants are connecting with the community AJC after release?
18. *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?
19. *Summarize what we know about the services provided to participants post-release, after a connection is made with the community AJC, based on the first round of visits. Ask if there have been any changes.*
  - Have there been changes in what services are available, or who they are available for?
  - Have there been changes in when services are provided to participants, or in who provides the services?
  - Have there been changes in the content or intensity of services?
  - Why were these changes made?
20. *Summarize what we know from the first round of visits about how they connect participants with other supports needed upon release, such as housing assistance, transportation assistance, mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, and access to public benefits. Ask if there have been any changes.*
  - Why were these changes made?

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### Part VIII. Participant Outcomes (10 minutes) [F]

21. *Summarize what we know about how services or participants are tracked by the program. Ask if there have been any changes.*
22. Based on your experience with participants, are they able to find jobs after they are released?
  - Approximately what proportion of your cases find work within the first 3 months after they are released?
  - How long does it take to find work, on average?
  - In what industries or occupations do they typically find jobs?
  - What is the typical wage and hours worked for a participant who finds work?
  - How effective do you feel the services provided by the program have been in helping participants find jobs? Why have they (not) been effective?
23. Are those who find work able to stay employed?
  - If yes, what services, supports, or other factors play a role in helping them stay employed?
  - If not, what are common reasons?

### Part IX. Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned (20 minutes) [H]

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

24. What have been the biggest successes in the past year for 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?
25. What major challenges have you encountered in the past year? Have these challenges been addressed successfully? How?
26. *[If not mentioned in response to previous question]* In our last round of interviews, we heard that there were challenges with *[insert challenges based on first round of visits]*. Have those challenges been addressed? How?
27. 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.



28. What factors will determine whether the program will be sustained beyond the end of the grant?
29. If this program were to be replicated elsewhere in your state or in the country, what are the key program elements that would need to be included for the program to be successful?

**[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.