

Three Years, Two Counties, One Goal

CREATING SYSTEMWIDE CHANGE TO PROMOTE RECIDIVISM-REDUCTION & EMPLOYMENT READINESS

SUMMARY

*The **Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies (IRES)** framework synthesizes innovative strategies with the goal of reducing recidivism while increasing job readiness for people returning to communities after incarceration.*

The IRES framework focuses on operationalizing a level of cross-systems coordination among corrections and workforce-development agencies and community-based service providers to bridge best practices from the corrections, reentry, and workforce development fields.

The IRES framework was implemented in two pilot sites: Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, and Palm Beach County, Florida. A recently released report about the three-year pilot project from The Council of State Governments Justice Center provides key learnings and insights for jurisdictions looking to improve their systems.

**“The way
the system
is designed,
clients give
up.”
- IRES Pilot
Project site staff**



THE PROBLEM

For the 95 percent of people in state prisons who will eventually be released, and the many others who are returning to communities from local jails, finding and retaining employment is critical in reducing their likelihood of ending up back behind bars. However, the corrections, reentry, and workforce agencies involved in facilitating employment services for people returning from incarceration are often confronted with a lack of resources and services, making it nearly impossible to successfully serve every adult leaving prison or jail seeking a job.

Compounding these issues is the absence of coordination and planning among agencies and service providers. This often leads to a variety of roadblocks, such as the inefficient use of already minimal resources and the delivery of redundant or ineffective services that aren't appropriate for a person's specific needs or job-readiness level.

IRES FRAMEWORK

In 2013, The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center—in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), the U.S. Department of Labor, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and subject matter experts—developed the [*Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies \(IRES\) white paper*](#), an innovative framework of evidence-based practices and tools to help communities transform the way they deliver employment-centric reentry services.

The IRES framework asserts that recidivism and employment outcomes will improve if resources are applied based on risk-needs-responsivity (RNR) principles on a systemwide scale. In particular, the framework emphasizes that connecting a person to the right combination of services with the appropriate level of intensity during various points of the reentry planning process can reduce his or her chance of recidivating. These resources refocus a person's time and efforts on prosocial activities, making them less likely to engage in riskier behaviors or associate with people who do.

THE IRES PILOT PROJECT

To test the framework's theory, a three-year IRES pilot project began in 2015 in two sites: Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, and Palm Beach County, Florida. The first year, researchers boiled down the many facets regarding a community's ability to integrate the efforts of criminal justice and workforce development systems into the following questions:

1. Is our leadership committed to a collaborative approach?
2. Do we conduct timely risk and needs assessments and job-readiness screenings?
3. Have we conducted a comprehensive process analysis and inventory of employment services that are provided pre- and post-release?
4. Do we have a coordinated process for making service referrals and tracking data?

Throughout the pilot project, despite the challenges, the sites made strides toward addressing these four questions, establishing processes for referring people to appropriate reentry and employment services and ensuring that these services had the capacity meet their needs. These efforts are not limited to the two IRES pilot sites; other communities across the country have begun exploring some of the strategies to establish an integrated approach.

For more information about key takeaways from the pilot project, you can read the IRES Pilot Project Process Evaluation Report [here](https://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/publications/integrated-reentry-employment-strategies-pilot-project-process-evaluation-report/): <https://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/publications/integrated-reentry-employment-strategies-pilot-project-process-evaluation-report/>.

Community-based programs and providers seeking to gauge their fidelity to these principles and capacity for providing the services needed to facilitate a successful reentry can view the IRES Self-Assessment for Employment-Focused Reentry Programs at <https://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/publications/self-assessment-for-employment-focused-reentry-programs>.

For more information about the Reentry and Employment Project, please visit: <https://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/reentry-and-employment/>.