

North Carolina's Reentry Council:

A State Blueprint for Whole-of-Government Success

Reentry is a public health, economic, and community safety issue, and success requires coordination and meaningful collaboration among state, local, and community partners. North Carolina's Joint Reentry Council offers a roadmap for how other states can take this whole-of-government approach to improve reentry outcomes.

Why North Carolina Took Action

In January 2024, then-Governor Roy Cooper signed [Executive Order 303](#), launching North Carolina's [Reentry 2030](#) initiative and setting bold goals to

- Improve economic mobility;
- Expand access to education, employment, health care and behavioral health services;
- Ensure Medicaid coverage upon release;
- Reduce the number of people returning to homelessness; and
- Remove barriers to successful community reintegration, especially for people returning to historically underserved communities.

To achieve these goals, the Executive Order created a new statewide commission—the [Joint Reentry Council \(JRC\)](#)—that directs all North Carolina state agencies to coordinate efforts to improve reentry outcomes for people returning to the community from incarceration.

This whole-of-government approach is critical because it recognizes that reentry is not just a criminal justice issue. By engaging health, housing, workforce,

and community stakeholders, North Carolina built a collaborative framework to ensure that reentry efforts are holistic and address the full spectrum of challenges that returning North Carolinians face.

“As a person of faith, these issues we’re tackling through Reentry 2030 mean a lot to me. Every person deserves the opportunity to live a life of purpose and abundance, even when we make a mistake. But I also believe it is the smart thing to do. We all want stronger and safer communities—95% of incarcerated people in North Carolina will at some point complete their sentences and reenter society, and it makes sense to give them the support and resources they need to be successful and turn their lives around instead of turning back to crime.”

—FORMER NORTH CAROLINA GOVERNOR ROY COOPER

North Carolina's Blueprint for Collaboration

Establishing Structure:

The Joint Reentry Council (JRC)

Executive Order 303 established a unified, whole-of-government approach to reentry. North Carolina's JRC serves as the coordinating body for this effort, bringing together representatives from each cabinet agency, the Post-Release Supervision and Parole Commission, the Office of State Human Resources, the Office of State Budget and Management, and the First Lady. The council is chaired by the secretary of adult correction and supported by dedicated staff who coordinate meetings, manage communications, and track progress toward shared goals.

The full council meets every two months to review progress on the statewide reentry strategy, share data, and hear updates from agency leaders, community partners, and researchers. Meetings often feature presentations from departments such as transportation, commerce, and health and human services, as well as from local reentry councils and community-based organizations that highlight innovative practices or identify barriers to successful reentry. These sessions serve as coordinating and learning opportunities to strengthen collaboration across agencies and ensure that the council's priorities are grounded in evidence-based practices and meet the needs of returning North Carolinians.

“Having a seat at the table as someone with lived experience has been incredibly meaningful. It's not just about being included, it's about helping shape decisions that impact real people incarcerated and coming home.”

—KERWIN PITTMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RECIDIVISM REDUCTION EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS SERVICES, INC.

Driving Action: The Role of Subcommittees

To translate vision into action, the JRC created seven subcommittees:

1. Strategic Planning¹
2. Reentry Preparation
3. Career Readiness and Employer Engagement
4. Education
5. Behavioral and Physical Health
6. Housing Support
7. Community Resources

Each is co-chaired by a representative from the Department of Adult Correction and a representative from another state agency. These subcommittees function as the operational backbone of the council, driving progress in key areas. Each subcommittee includes not only JRC members and government representatives, but also community stakeholders who bring on-the-ground expertise and insight into the reentry needs of diverse communities across the state.

For example, the housing subcommittee includes leaders from the Departments of Adult Correction, Military and Veterans Affairs, Public Safety, and Health and Human Services, alongside local reentry councils,

¹ This subcommittee was limited to the first six-month period of the JRC, starting to oversee the development of the strategic plan and provide support to the other subcommittees on ensuring each strategy has a metric.

sheriffs' offices, the Parole Commission, policymakers, and community-based reentry organizations that connect people to housing resources in the community. Subcommittees report regularly to the Department of Adult Correction, which compiles progress updates and performance data.

By creating these subcommittees, North Carolina was able to garner support from key state leaders while engaging organizational staff with the capacity to carry out the work.

The subcommittees drive day-to-day implementation of the strategies identified in the strategic plan and

continually report progress to the JRC. This structure effectively balances leadership and action: High-level officials provide authority and decision-making, while subcommittees, which include program staff working more directly in facilities and communities, have the capacity to advance operational work and respond to emerging challenges.

Councils limited only to high-level officials can lack capacity for day-to-day work, while overly large councils may be unwieldy. North Carolina solved this by pairing cabinet-level leadership with subcommittees that included frontline staff and community members.

How the Council Advances North Carolina's Reentry Goals

The JRC began with monthly meetings to establish momentum, deepen members' understanding of existing efforts happening across state government to support people returning home, and foster

collaboration across agencies. In the first few months, the JRC directed the subcommittees to map strategies for achieving the state's goals and identify actions that state agencies can take collectively.

“The Joint Reentry Council embodies North Carolina’s commitment to treating reentry as a statewide and community-wide challenge. By bringing together government and community stakeholders, we work to ensure that every person returning home has access to the resources and support they need to succeed.”

—LESLIE COOLEY DISMUKES, SECRETARY, NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF ADULT CORRECTION

Building a Statewide Strategic Plan

The JRC's first priority was developing a [Strategic Plan for Reentry 2030](#), which recognizes that successful reentry requires more than just securing employment; it involves access to housing, health care, education, technology, and community support. By focusing on these interconnected areas, North Carolina aims to create a robust support system that addresses

the multifaceted needs of people returning to their communities from incarceration. The strategic plan explicitly defines key outcomes and metrics for success, guiding both state-level coordination and local implementation. Strategies are prioritized based on need, feasibility, and potential impact, and subcommittees are responsible for leading initiatives in their respective areas.

One of the plan's major objectives centers on expanding digital access and literacy. Recognizing that digital connectivity is essential for everything from job searches and employment training to telehealth and family connection, the Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) is investing in digital literacy training programs inside correctional facilities and ensuring access to digital navigation in all 100 counties in the state for people returning home to their communities. These programs help people obtain accessible internet services, access devices that meet their needs, and build the digital skills necessary to participate fully in modern life. By integrating digital inclusion into the state's reentry framework, the strategic plan ensures that technology is a bridge, not a barrier, to opportunity and successful reintegration.

Investing in Local, Community-Led Solutions

A defining feature of North Carolina's reentry approach is investing directly in communities. Reentry is a hyperlocal issue, and statewide reentry efforts have often faced the challenge of using state government to alleviate local challenges. In North Carolina, state agencies are already investing new funding to support people in reentry through local efforts. The North Carolina Department of Commerce [awarded \\$750,000 in grants](#) to support the creation of new local reentry councils. These local reentry councils deliver direct services and

“The beauty of this initiative is that every agency involved is already doing the work in some way. The JRC brought that shared motivation together in one place... Digital access helps people to thrive and is a necessity, not a luxury.”

—ANNETTE TAYLOR, DEPUTY SECRETARY, DIVISION OF BROADBAND AND DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY, NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

connect people returning from incarceration to housing, employment, and other supports.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) developed a new transitional work pilot program to train incarcerated people in highway construction, and formerly incarcerated individuals are already being hired to do this work in Raleigh. A \$274,000 NCDOT contract with the Center for Employment Opportunities in Charlotte is partnering to employ formerly incarcerated people in roadside maintenance and traffic control.

“Ensuring we have a workforce to meet the high demand for highway construction, maintenance, and operations workers is a key priority. NCDOT's involvement with the JRC has created opportunities for collaboration with other state agencies and industry partners to recruit and retain skilled workers to deliver on the projects that our communities need.”

—EBONY PITTMAN, DEPUTY SECRETARY FOR BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION, NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

North Carolina's Commitment to Accountability and Transparency

A critical element of North Carolina's JRC is building accountability into its process. The strategic plan details measurable objectives tied to the state's broader reentry goals, ensuring that progress is tracked and reported.

Regular reporting to state leadership and the public reinforces accountability and builds trust with communities. North Carolina released its [Reentry 2030](#)

[Dashboard](#) in September 2025, which offers clear visualizations of progress on all 26 objectives and 133 strategies detailed in the strategic plan. The JRC reports on progress toward its goals annually through a [Progress Report](#) each December. Transparency has been a key factor in maintaining credibility and allows stakeholders, especially people directly impacted by the criminal justice system, to see how decisions are made and how resources are deployed.

“Transparency increases trust both internally and with the public by increasing accountability, enhancing collaboration, and showing a commitment to reform.”

—GEORGE PETTIGREW, SENIOR DEPUTY SECRETARY, REHABILITATION AND REENTRY, NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF ADULT CORRECTION

Lessons Learned from North Carolina

North Carolina's experience shows that successful reentry requires strong cross-system leadership, inclusive participation from agencies and community stakeholders, clear accountability, and strategic investment efforts in local reentry efforts. By embedding

reentry in a whole-of-government framework, North Carolina has created a replicable model that other states and counties can adapt to improve public health, economic opportunity, and community safety for people returning home from incarceration.

“The JRC has completely transformed the way I think about reentry. Through its Reentry Simulations, my eyes were opened to the overwhelming challenges faced by our returning citizens.... If another state asked me why a council like this matters, I would tell them that there is no greater way to find true fulfillment in your daily work than through helping others and especially those who need a hand up, not a handout.”

—ANDREA ALLARD, DIRECTOR OF OUTREACH AND TRANSITION SUPPORT, NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

Key Steps for Creating a Reentry Council

1 Establish a strong mandate: Begin with an executive order, legislation, or county resolution that gives the council authority, legitimacy, and visibility. Set clear, measurable goals and a timeline for the council's work.

2 Design an inclusive structure: Include high-level representation from key state and county agencies, such as corrections and supervision agencies, health and human services, labor, commerce, education, housing authorities, people with lived experience, and community organizations that support people returning home from incarceration. Ensure representation reflects the state or county's racial, gender, geographic, and economic diversity.

3 Develop a strategic plan: Charge the council with creating a comprehensive reentry strategic plan that identifies goals, strategies, and performance measures, outlines roles for each partner, and establishes a timeline for implementation. Include a process for collecting and analyzing data to identify barriers and track progress.

4 Share progress regularly: Report outcomes through an annual report, online dashboard, and public meetings. Highlight successes, challenges, and lessons learned to promote transparency, build trust, and hold the council accountable to the public and its partners.

5 Plan for sustainability: Dedicate staff support to coordinate the council's work and manage subcommittees. Identify funding such as state appropriations, federal grants, or private/philanthropic investment to sustain the work long term.