



Occupational Outlook Report 2012 Update: Focus on Reentry

Prepared for the San Diego Workforce Partnership

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INTRODUCTION

One of the San Diego Workforce Partnership's most valued publications is its semi-annual Occupational Outlook Report. This study explores San Diego businesses growth occupations, with a focus on important skills, education, training, and experience to help job seekers navigate the path to successful and sustainable employment. In 2011, the San Diego Workforce Partnership identified and detailed over 50 such occupations.

The Occupational Outlook Report, or OOR, is a valuable tool that is generally applicable to a wide range of job seekers. Given recent economic and policy trends, it has become evident that population-specific research is important to discern the best ways to work with target groups, such as youth, the long-term unemployed, the underemployed, and other sets of individuals with some common backgrounds. One such group, the previously incarcerated, has been identified as being of core importance nationally and in the San Diego region.

Though prisoner reentry issues are important throughout the entire country, perhaps no state is dealing with a greater challenge than California. In what has been referred to as a "prison crisis," California is facing issues of prison crowding that have been deemed by the courts to be unacceptable. As a result, the state has been ordered to release thousands of prisoners or find them more suitable housing.

At the same time, the state budget quagmire is worsening the crisis. To save money (and also in response to court-ordered releases), the state is actively reassigning some prisoners and releasing others. The cuts are also scaling back rehabilitation programs, perhaps undermining the chances of many prisoners from avoiding recidivism.

There has been a great deal of research focused on prisoner recidivism and the programmatic supports that can help formerly incarcerated people succeed upon release. The San Diego Workforce Partnership commissioned BW Research Partnership (BW Research) to conduct focused research on reentry workforce issues to supplement its 2011 Occupational Outlook Report (OOR). This research was developed

with a particular focus on industries and occupations that may be relevant for job seekers with a prior criminal conviction. The research is intended to inform the development and refinement of prisoner reentry programs.

In the first phase of research, BW Research conducted a literature review, together with nine (9) executive interviews of employers and stakeholders. This information was used to determine the current programs offered throughout the United States and to refine specific questions that were asked of 2011 OOR survey participants. This information was also used to develop a survey instrument and resume panel discussion guide, each primary data components of the project. A survey was administered to a sample of OOR respondents (n=263) and resume panels were conducted (live and online) with 28 local employers.

This report, commissioned by the San Diego Workforce Partnership, provides a overview of these efforts, including a summary of results and detailed conclusions and recommendations.

PRISONER REENTRY – AN OVERVIEW

Prisoner reentry is a pressing national issue, with particular implications for California. All across the country, workforce investment boards, departments of corrections, community colleges, and community organizations are attempting to tackle the many obstacles and challenges facing incarcerated individuals upon their release. California's prison crisis, fueled by court-ordered solutions to overcrowding and budget cuts, has exacerbated the need for action in the state.

Significant research has been conducted on prisoner reentry issues. The most comprehensive report conducted to date is the 2003 *Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council: Charting the Safe and Successful Return of Prisoners to the Community*.¹ The report, containing over 500 pages of useful data, conclusions, and recommendations, is straightforward, useful, and can be tailored to meet specific regions'

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needs. Though this OOR supplement is focused on workforce issues, a review of the relevant factors that contribute to the overall success of prisoner reentry is both useful and necessary, as the issues and obstacles facing formerly incarcerated individuals cannot be untangled easily nor viewed in a vacuum.

According to the Re-Entry Policy Council Report, more than 7 million people are released from U.S. prisons each year, and incarceration rates have risen over 350% in since the early 1980s. At the same time, about 2/3 of people released from prison are arrested again within three years of their release.² Even if state and local governments desired to build more prisons, current budgets cannot address the capital costs, nor

¹ Council of State Governments, <http://reentrypolicy.org>, 2003.

² *Id.*, at Executive Summary p. 1.

even keep pace with the “soaring costs of corrections.”³ Other pertinent facts from the report include:

- 75% of prisoners have a substance abuse problem, but only 10% in state prisons and 3% in local jails receive formal treatment;
- 2/3 do not have a high school diploma and only 1/3 receive vocational training;
- 20% receive no supervision upon release
- 1/3 report a physical or mental disability and about half earned less than \$7,500 per year before incarceration.⁴

Given the current economic and workforce structure in the United States, it is no wonder why prisoners have difficulty obtaining employment upon their release. Often

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lacking basic skills and relevant experience, the substance abuse and disability

issues, together with the stigmas associated with incarceration, reentering prisoners have a significant up-hill battle.

While the obstacles seem enormous, too little is being done to aid prisoners reentering the community. In California, one study found enormous gaps in needed service provision. That report indicated that there were only 200 shelter beds for 10,000 homeless parolees, four mental health clinics for 18,000 cases, and 750 rehabilitation treatment beds for 85,000 released substance abusers.⁵

San Diego County is addressing these issues head on. Led by the Community Corrections Partnership, or CCP, which is led by the County Probations Department, and the Reentry Roundtable, new and more efficient services are being developed for

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Travis, Jeremy, et. al, *From Prison to Home: The Dimensions and Consequences of Prisoner Reentry*, Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, June 2001.

transitioning residents. As detailed in this report, strong local leadership and effective state policies are making a difference in San Diego's ability to serve this important population.

The Reentry Policy Council Report is an important resource, and provides concrete ideas targeted to various segments of people interested in reentry issues. Its suggestions include:

1. **Get started** by engaging stakeholders, getting people together, and understanding the local issues for reentry;
2. **Address core challenges** by redefining missions, maximizing and leveraging funding, integrating systems, measuring performance, and informing and reassuring the public; and
3. **Develop policies and programs** including offering safe housing, counseling and support, vocational education and training, treatment for mental illness and addiction, providing supervision, and fostering meaningful relationships.

The report also suggests nine potential uses for the report, at least two of which⁶ are relevant for the San Diego Workforce Partnership and its stakeholders, with the focus on employment. Clearly, a comprehensive approach that leverages existing supports identified by the Re-Entry Policy Council, is critical. This report includes detailed findings and recommendations, including the development of a task force committee (already in place in San Diego) to oversee and coordinate activities. This report can be used as an important tool for conversation and decision-making for the task force.

⁶ Items #2 and #3.

SURVEY RESULTS AND SECONDARY DATA

OVERVIEW

To accurately quantify a) the propensity of employers in San Diego hiring formerly incarcerated individuals, and b) the prospects for employment for those individuals, BW Research collected survey responses from 2011 OOR participants. The survey, administered online and by telephone, was completed by 263 employers located throughout San Diego County from the following industries: 1) hospitality and leisure; 2) construction; 3) healthcare; 4) manufacturing; 5) retail, and 6) automotive repair⁷.

BW Research conducted interviews with nine (9) local employers to develop a quantitative survey designed to test the willingness of employers in target industries to hire previously incarcerated applicants. Those indicating willingness were then asked detailed questions about their experiences with ex-offenders, specific occupational opportunities at their firms for ex-offenders, and perceptions relative to the backgrounds of job seekers and the value of potential reentry programs.

The survey was administered online and by telephone, with a total of 263 responses (n=263) throughout the county. Of these approximately 1/3, or 86 employers reported that they would be willing to hire a person with a prior incarceration, half reported “it depends (131 employers), and 18%, or 46 employers, reported that they would not hire previously incarcerated individuals. The 217 respondents who reported “yes” or “it depends” were asked the remaining survey questions.

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRY BREAKDOWN

Of the 217 respondents, 61% have no known previously incarcerated workers on staff. Of the 86 that reported willingness to hire, 42% reported employing zero (0) workers with a prior incarceration. The average firm in the larger sample employs 2.5 previously incarcerated workers. The smaller sample mean is 3.8. Of all 217

⁷ A review of previous OOR data showed that healthcare firms were willing to hire individuals with a criminal past, however, upon further research and examination, it was determined that these were typically for minor offenses that did not include incarceration.

respondents, the major industries represented were construction (18%), manufacturing (17%), retail (16%), wholesale trade and distribution (16%).

Respondents were also asked about the specifics of the individual's background on their employability. Not surprisingly, violent crimes are the most difficult for employers (60%), followed by repeat offenses, felonies, and type of crime committed (such as fraud, etc.). Surprisingly, length of incarceration, honesty, and experience mattered little to surveyed employers. At the same time, 27% of respondents said that presence of at-home supervision or parole would impact their decision-making, which was lower than expected based on the literature review and interviews. For the "yes" respondents only, the only significant difference is that length of incarceration was more important to employers than in the larger group.

EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS: THE CRIME

Employers were also asked about factors aside from the criminal conviction that are important factors in their decision-making. The most significant factor reported was



whether the applicant has the education, experience, and skills to do the job, followed by trust, and absence or presence of basic skills.

Surprisingly, aggression and

anger, substance abuse, interpersonal skills, and licensing were all reported as important by fewer than 4% of firms! Filtering out the "it depends" respondents did not change the results dramatically, though slightly more firms in this category focus on appearance and background checks.

EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS: THE VALUE OF REENTRY PROGRAMS

Survey respondents also reported the perceived value of various reentry components. For the larger sample, 59% of employers reported that they would be more willing to hire formerly incarcerated individuals if they went through a screening, evaluation, and training program (19% significantly more likely). References from program providers regarding workforce readiness training, internships, and other training were even more valuable, as 68% of employers reported that they would be more likely to hire with such references (28% significantly more likely). A work readiness case manager assignment also makes employers more likely to hire formerly incarcerated applicants, with 51% reporting that they would be more likely to do so (19% significantly more likely). Finally, 38% of employers reported that they would be willing to offer job coaching and shadowing for individuals prior to hiring them. There were no significant differences reported by the smaller, “yes” firms.

OCCUPATIONAL DATA

The following occupations were tested for firms’ willingness to hire previously incarcerated individuals.⁸

Construction (n=29)

Occupation	Yes	No	N/A or DNE
Laborer or helper	76%	14%	10%
Construction Foreman	48%	31%	21%
Specialty Trade Contractor	48%	17%	35%
Administrative Assistant or Clerk	41%	48%	10%
Financial Clerk or Accountant	21%	69%	10%
Manager or Site Manager	60%	10%	30%

⁸ Note that the occupational data have smaller sample sizes and therefore higher individual margins of error.

Manufacturing (n=30)

Occupation	Yes	No	N/A or DNE
Assembler	37%	0%	63%
Laborer or Helper	80%	3%	17%
Manager or Supervisor	47%	53%	0%
Quality Control Technician	60%	3%	37%

Automotive (n=38)

Occupation	Yes	No	N/A or DNE
Administrative Assistant	58%	26%	16%
Professional Staff	50%	26%	24%
Entry Level Technician or Support Worker	84%	0%	16%

Retail (n=35)

Occupation	Yes	No	N/A or DNE
Cashier	31%	31%	37%
Customer Service Representative	63%	23%	14%
Manager	46%	34%	20%
Accounting or Administrative	31%	46%	26%

Logistics and Transportation (n=37)

Occupation	Yes	No	N/A or DNE
Driver, Truck	55%	18%	26%
Laborer or Mover	60%	11%	30%
Weigher	14%	14%	73%
Logistics Operator	30%	16%	54%
Manager, Supervisor	44%	42%	14%

INTERVIEWS AND RESUME PANELS

In addition to the quantitative survey, BW Research conducted one-on-one interviews with executives and hiring managers as well as online and live resume panels with employers to discuss hiring trends, needs, and preferences to inform the work of the



San Diego Workforce Partnership. The research was allocated to two tasks, understanding better the specific characteristics of a resume that are important for all job seekers, and

determining the critical success factors that may be replicated to aid previously incarcerated individuals in their search for work. This phase of research allowed the research team to examine the context of survey findings as well as probe more deeply into issues uncovered in earlier phases of research.

Employers for the panels were selected from survey respondents that at some point in the OOR research (including this supplemental effort) indicated some willingness to hire workers with a criminal background. These employers were drawn from construction, retail, manufacturing, wholesale trade, and automotive repair industries, and participants were most often human resources professionals, owners, and managers of their respective firms, which ranged from six employees to over 15,000.

RESUME AND HIRING TRENDS FOR ALL JOB SEEKERS

Employer participants were first asked a series of questions to understand the importance of a resume, how candidates should present themselves, and other hiring preferences to aid all job seekers in these industries. First, the research team explored

how employers were finding candidates. Though most employers noted that they get more resumes than they need (and that the majority of those do not even have the basic requirements to do the job), personal referrals surfaced as by far the most preferred recruiting method. This was followed by monster and craigslist and other online postings (by about half of employers).

Employers were then asked about the role and importance of a resume. With only a few exceptions (some government positions and lower level positions in

manufacturing and trade/logistics), the resume plays a very important role.⁹ The research is clear that concise, well-

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drafted resumes are critical to receiving an interview, even in non-professional or clerical roles. Employers noted that while some more leeway may be given for typos and other errors in a technician's resume (as opposed to an administrative assistant's, for example) due to the nature of the work, there are very few positions where the resume can be ignored.

The research team also tested the importance of social media accounts vis-à-vis the resume. Not surprisingly, for most positions, the resume is more important, with the potential exception of sales positions. Applicants working in fields that have direct contact with customers require more discretion and appeal to their social networking activities. In fact, it seemed to be a nearly linear function – the more contact with customers, the more interested employers were regarding social media accounts. For the most part, employers were focused on determining propriety of information on the networks and development of good social skills when discussing the role of social media on their perceptions of applicants.

⁹ Though this phase was not quantitative in nature, it bears noting that 12 of the 28 participants used the terms “extremely important,” “very important,” or “huge” during their sessions when discussing the role of the resume.

Despite the apparent importance of the resume, only two employers placed it as most important, over interview, experience, and education, when asked to rank importance. Of these components, the overall ranking more or less was: 1) industry-specific experience; 2) quality of interview; 3) quality of educational background; and 4) quality of resume. Even this simple ranking can be misleading, however, as employers noted that it is better to have a candidate who is merely good at all four than exceptional in one and lacking in others.

The resume itself does indicate some important preliminary information about the candidate. Specifically, respondents noted the paper, the physical condition of the resume, and the accuracy of information are generally applicable important considerations, regardless of occupational category. These factors suggest the cleanliness/appearance of the individual, their sense of pride over their work, and their honesty.

For administrative or other office-related positions, spelling, grammar, and formatting are even more important. This is because such things are directly related to the type of work performed by the position, and indicates attention to detail, which is a



key skill for many administrative assistants. Obviously, this skill is less important for general laborers, and as a result, it is less important on their resumes than others.

Several different occupations were tested (see attached resumes in the appendices). Perhaps the largest takeaway is that personal preference dominates visual appearance. On resume was printed back to back, eliciting three different responses from different employers:

- “Never print on back. I don’t like this”
- “This is good, I like the two-sided printing”
- “The two-sided printing is probably okay. I guess it shows environmental commitment.”

Other notes regarding the resumes themselves included considerations for font sizes and putting experience front and center. Content-related comments reflected this as well, with the majority of respondents looking to see what the applicant had done. Education and training was considerably less important than experience, and employers suggested that applicants really make the experience section pop out.

REENTRY SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Most employers were willing to entertain hiring ex-offenders, depending on the crime and position. However, the severity of the crime, was less important with the exception of two key areas: 1) **violent crimes are very difficult to deal with**, based on fear and specific (bad) experience; **and 2) crimes directly related to the position** (e.g., shoplifting in retail, fraud in accounting, etc.)

Much more important to employers than the actual crime committed is what has happened since then. Is there a history of rehabilitation? Have there been repeat

offenses? What indicators can be offered to show a history of good behavior or positive community engagement?

Employers noted

that whether or not all will admit it, where the person lives, how many visible tattoos they have, and their appearance of cleanliness will have an impact on their chances. Also

Another key theme... is the need for honesty. Ex-offenders willing to come clean and explain have a much greater likelihood of getting a chance...

important are friends or relatives who are current employees who can vouch for the applicant.

Another key theme, highlighted in nearly every panel interview, is the **need for honesty**. Ex-offenders willing to come clean and explain have a much greater likelihood of getting a chance than those who say nothing and let the CORI check find them out. Just as entry-level applicants are told to explain gaps in their resumes, ex-offenders need to be ready to explain their backgrounds to potentially wary employers.

One important differentiator for ex-offenders can be their ability. Despite a social obligation bias to the contrary, most employers, if given two equal candidates to choose from, will select the one without a criminal conviction. However, if the previously incarcerated applicant has in-demand skills and a good work ethic, they are much more likely to be hired than a less qualified individual with a clean record.

Finally, employers embraced the idea of a program to support reentry. This level of support was somewhat surprising as it seemed higher than the support reported in the quantitative survey. This suggests either enhanced social obligation bias or that explanation and clarification of the issues and potential program components could shift the thinking of employers in a beneficial way.

Specifically, employers were interested in programs that could support the following:

1. Technical training leading to industry-specific credentials

- This not only proves to employers that the candidate has current skills and abilities, but also suggests that the applicant is willing to work to improve their lives and leave the past behind.

2. Counseling & Support

- Several employers noted that previously incarcerated individuals tend to have lower self-esteem and confidence. Programs that can build their self-worth can be important to aiding their successful and continued employment. These supports can also help employers feel more confident about substance abuse, anger management, and other common issues.

3. Work-Readiness Training

- Employers recognize that previously incarcerated individuals have been out of work for a long time, and therefore may need additional work-readiness training to reenter the workforce. A program focused on etiquette, timeliness, and work-ethic would be appreciated by employers.

4. Screening & Evaluation

- Employers reported that activities that reduce their risk and make it easier for them to fill open positions are important to them. Suggested activities include screening (such as substance abuse, mental health, etc.), evaluating (work readiness, technical proficiency), and connecting (sending resumes of screened, evaluated candidates, offering interns/temporary workers) applicants to opportunities.

EXISTING REENTRY PROGRAMS

For the past decade, the **San Diego Reentry Roundtable** has been a major force and forum for tackling obstacles in transitioning ex-offenders into the community. The Roundtable has been instrumental in implementing supportive programs and raising awareness of common reentry issues. This work has become even more important as the prison crisis deepens, and as funding becomes available to reduce recidivism.

Also to aid in prisoners' successful transition into the community, the legislature passed "The California Community Corrections Intensive Probation Services Act of 2009" (SB 678). This bill provides funding for county probation departments to reduce the number of revoked probations resulting in re-incarceration. SB 678 requires the establishment of a **Community Corrections Partnership**, a committee that includes local judges, the District Attorney, the Public Defender, the Sheriff, a police chief, and the heads of various agencies such as social services.

The Community Corrections Partnership – or CCP – and its related committees is chaired by the Chief Probation Officer for the County of San Diego County. Its purpose is to understand and provide important services to improve the successful reentry of formerly incarcerated individuals, and to allocate funding to reduce recidivism. The resulting partnership also provides the community with critical information and important baseline information to develop more effective workforce training programs for this population. One particularly interesting and exciting endeavor is the development of the Community Transition Center. Once open, this "one stop shop", which includes up to seven days of short term transitional housing, will be the first stop for individuals leaving prison and will provide for the thorough assessment of the risks and needs of the reentering offender, and immediate linkage to services shown to reduce the risk of recidivism.

In addition to the public sector activities related to reentry, San Diego is home to numerous nonprofit agencies that focus on successful transition. The two largest of these, **Second Chance** and **Occupational Training Services** (OTS), provide supportive programming that includes workforce training, employment placement, housing support, and education. Thanks to the strong spirit of collaboration and public

and private sources of funding, the nonprofit service providers and government agencies can operate more effectively and efficiently in San Diego.

The strong network of interested parties makes San Diego a model for developing prisoner reentry programs. It also provides an opportunity for the San Diego Workforce Partnership to provide more targeted and impactful workforce services to this important population.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The research provides ample opportunities for action. Specifically, the literature and research for this report suggests the following course of action:



5. Develop geographically relevant service delivery models

- The County has ample data on where prisoners are being released. The Workforce Partnership should **review its existing training offerings in each community to determine whether it is adequately serving this population. New programs targeted to the reentry population should be offered in the highest propensity communities.**

6. Partner with the Community Transition Center

- The goal of the partnership is to **establish a one-stop career center satellite office on site** and to otherwise coordinate workforce training with the County's other services. This one-stop center could offer targeted Workforce Investment Act (WIA) services to transitioning individuals, allowing for coordination with other supportive programs, once the Community Transition Center opens.

7. Offer Technical & Non-Technical Training

- With workforce experience opportunities and shadowing, where possible. Technical training should focus on: Construction and other general labor, Automotive repair, Customer service and retail, Truck driving. Credentials are specifically important to employers in these areas.

8. Provide Coaching & Support

- To the cohort, specifically targeted to building their resumes, addressing their convictions, and preparing for interviews. These services should also work to improve the self-esteem and confidence of cohort members. It should also focus on how to highlight skills and help applicants focus on their current commitment to reentry.

9. Leverage relationships with other providers

- to ensure that individuals receive appropriate healthcare, counseling and treatment, housing support, and other benefits to support their transition.

10. Evaluate Progress

- of cohort members to ascertain their progress and success and continue to refine and develop the program. This includes asking important questions such as:
 - What % Participate in Workforce Reentry Programs?
 - What % Use Other Available Services?
 - What are the Key Steps to Prepare Prisoners and their Families?
 - How are Reentering Individuals Prepared for Employment and Connected to the Local Labor Market?

APPENDIX A: SAN DIEGO CCP PRISONER DATA

San Diego County Post-Release Offender (PRO) Division Fact Sheet (Aug 9, 2012)

www.sdcountry.ca.gov/probation/docs/08-Post_Release_Offender_Fact_Sheets.pdf