

# Vera Institute of Justice

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

**<https://www.vera.org/publications/unlocking-potential-prison-to-postsecondary-education>**

## Policy Issue Resources

### Publication

College in prison communicates a simple, transformative idea: people leaving prison have futures we should value and great potential we should encourage and tap. The Vera Institute of Justice launched *Unlocking Potential: Pathways from Prison to Postsecondary Education* in 2012. Supported by five national foundations, the demonstration project gave colleges and state corrections agencies in Michigan, New Jersey, and North Carolina the means to offer programs in prison and build reentry pathways that would keep participants engaged in education after their release. During the project, Vera and its partners piloted numerous strategies to support incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students in their pursuit of higher education and laid the groundwork for a rigorous outcome evaluation. This report describes the projects design and implementation as well as the experiences of Pathways partners and students, and provides recommendations on policy and practice for college programs with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students.

Postsecondary education is transformative for participants in prison, students in the community, and corrections and college staff who work with them. The practices Pathways used can sow the seeds for larger changes in prisons, allowing incarcerated people, their families, and their communities to create different paths for the future.

The Pathways model allowed participants to attain a postsecondary credential while cultivating support among corrections agencies, policymakers, and communities for access to college education for incarcerated people.

The model involves three types of activities: those completed in prison; activities done after students release; and efforts to foster stakeholder engagement, policy change, and sustainability.

Each state offered multiple supports to students, including academic advising, tutoring, mentoring, study space, access to computers, shared housing and, in North Carolina, Internet service.

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Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

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