



Career Resource Centers: An Emerging Strategy for Improving Offender Employment Outcomes



The rise in America's prison population in recent decades and the resulting reexamination of prisoner rehabilitation and reentry practices have sparked a renewed interest in the role that employment plays in the reduction of recidivism. This interest, along with the development of a nationwide workforce development system, has led to a remarkable transformation in practices. Increasingly, jail and prison work programs are being viewed as an opportunity to provide skills that will connect offenders to long-term careers. Offender employment programs are evolving into workforce development initiatives that are career centered and offer a continuum of services from pretrial to incarceration, and from prison to the community. Most importantly, there is a new focus on using evidenced-based practices that promote successful reentry outcomes.

Although it is too early to tell what practices will yield the best results, career resource centers have emerged as a very promising strategy for preparing prisoners for the workforce and connecting them to sustainable jobs upon their release. Career resource

Message From the Director

During the past several years, there has been a renewed interest in the challenges faced by individuals with criminal histories who are seeking to become law-abiding citizens and an intensified search for strategies that will reduce recidivism rates. Securing and maintaining employment are critical to an offender's long-term success in the community. However, despite a nationwide effort to create a workforce development system that provides universal access through a one-stop service system, many offenders are not prepared to enter that system. As a consequence, the workforce development system struggles to meet their needs. Aligning the services of the national workforce system with the workforce development and reentry efforts of criminal justice systems is one of the most important challenges facing us today.

The National Institute of Corrections and the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education have partnered to document and support an emerging strategy that helps criminal justice professionals meet this challenge. This bulletin highlights the ways career resource centers are being used in jails, prisons, and community supervision offices to improve the long-term employment prospects of offenders. The document also offers, through references to a menu-driven companion DVD, a comprehensive set of resources that can be used to develop or enhance a career resource center for offenders.

Morris L. Thigpen
Director
National Institute of Corrections
U.S. Department of Justice

Cover Photo: In career resource centers, offenders work closely with inmate career clerks to obtain the information and skills necessary to successfully make the transition from incarceration to employment.

Credits: John Rakis is the author of this bulletin and developed its companion DVD. Melissa C. Houston conducted the preliminary research for this document and assisted with the video content. Photos are courtesy of John Rakis.

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centers are designated locations within jails, prisons, probation and parole offices, and community-based agencies where offenders can receive career guidance and employment assistance. Although training and employment-related programs have long been considered an important part of the rehabilitation process, career resource centers are a relatively new strategy that parallels the introduction of One-Stop Career Centers funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). These centers were mandated by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, which required communities to create one-stop service systems to deliver the employment and training services funded by the federal government. All One-Stop Career Centers supported by DOL are guided by the principles of universal access, customer choice, service integration, and accountability.

Although community-based One-Stop Career Centers are mandated to serve all, many criminal justice practitioners recognized the need to begin the career exploration process and deliver employment-related services long before the offender is released to the community. Most offenders reentering their communities need to secure employment as quickly as possible, largely because they do not have significant savings and have an immediate need to financially sustain themselves. If they visit a community-based One-Stop Career Center without a Social Security card or birth certificate, without having addressed their barriers to employment, and without a career plan, their reentry into the workplace will be significantly delayed despite the best efforts made by community service providers.

The consequences of this delay are considerable. A study of inmates discharged from correctional systems in 1994 revealed that nearly 30 percent of offenders were arrested for a felony or serious misdemeanor within the first 6 months of their release (Langan and Levin 2002). Clearly, there is a need to provide career-related services before an offender's release to the community and to ensure a continuity of services throughout the reentry process. Career resource centers provide an excellent avenue for meeting both needs. Although many career resource centers for offenders began with a modest, targeted effort such as résumé preparation assistance or interview workshops, their development ultimately serves as a catalyst for greater awareness of the employment needs of offenders and as a platform for the development of partnerships and community-based resources.



To hear from practitioners about the importance employment plays in reentry, click “Introduction” on the main menu of this bulletin’s companion DVD.

Common Elements of Career Resource Centers

Although career resource centers vary considerably in the scope of services provided, most share four common elements. The first is the delivery of information related to the world of work. This ranges from information on how to secure employment to comprehensive data on labor market trends, job requirements, and training opportunities in the community.

A second common element of career resource centers is the delivery of instruction that prepares offenders for the labor force. Offenders often lack the soft skills necessary to secure and maintain employment. They have a limited knowledge of job search strategies, are ill equipped to handle a job interview, and lack many of the skills needed to retain employment. Through one-on-one guidance, group workshops, and computer-aided instruction, career resource centers attempt to build the “employment readiness” of offenders, making them more marketable to employers and better equipped to be productive workers.

A third important element of career resource centers is the delivery of career exploration and assessment services. Many offenders have moved from one short-term job to another without giving any consideration to pursuing a career that is matched to their skills and abilities. The delivery of career exploration and assessment services provides offenders with the opportunity to identify their interests and plan a course of action that will lead to a suitable training and employment opportunity. It also allows them to identify any barriers to employment that might exist and to develop a plan for addressing those barriers.

In addition to providing information, instruction, and assessment services, career resource centers often serve as a bridge between correctional facilities and community-based resources. No single agency can provide all the services needed by offenders who are returning to the community. Collaborations and partnerships between criminal justice agencies and community-based services



A career resource center provides offenders with access to information about the world of work, including how to secure employment, comprehensive data on labor market trends, and job requirements.

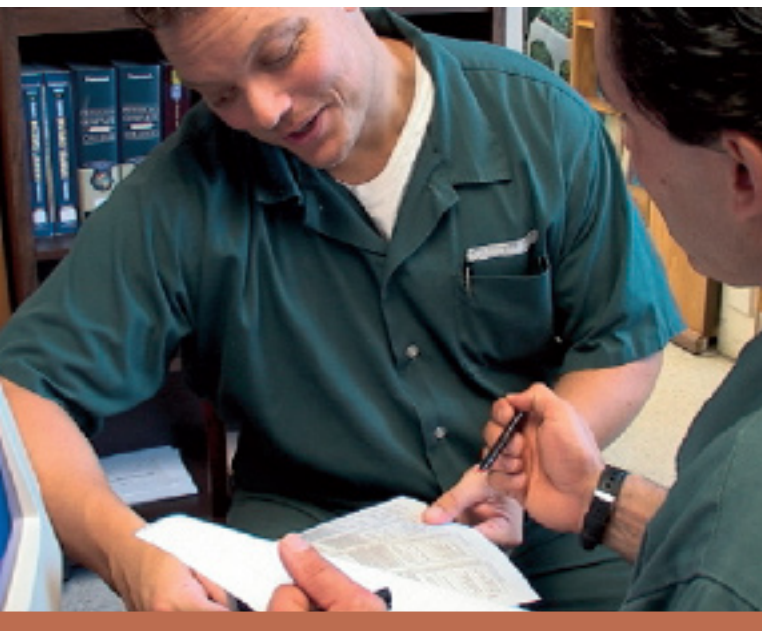
are essential, and career resource centers can serve as a catalyst for their development. Initially, the relationship between the career resource center and community partners may be limited to an exchange of information. This exchange inevitably evolves into a more substantial relationship involving facility visits, letters of agreement, and ultimately the delivery of services.

Getting Started

Anyone embarking on the startup or enhancement of a career resource center for offenders needs to consider several questions:

- What resources are needed to support the project?
- What skills do staff members need to supervise a career resource center?
- What role will offenders play in the project? How will they be trained?
- Who are the stakeholders? What can they contribute to the initiative?

Given the budget constraints placed on most criminal justice agencies and the competition that exists for scarce program resources, the development of a career resource center can be a very challenging task. This challenge can be met by implementing services gradually and using many of the no-cost resources that are available to practitioners from a variety of sources. A career resource center can initially be incorporated into a reception area, a prison library, a classroom, or any other space that can accommodate a computer,



The quality of the supervision provided by staff is an essential ingredient in the effectiveness of a career resource center. Staff should be knowledgeable about sources of labor market information and be prepared to help offenders make informed career decisions based on their abilities and interests.

a bookshelf, and a bulletin board. As the demand for employment-related services increases, additional accommodations can be acquired accordingly.

This bulletin's companion DVD provides an electronic library of information that can be used to set up a career resource center and provide offenders with career exploration, reentry, and educational guidance. Resources on the DVD include:

***The Employment Resource Center Handbook* (U.S. Bureau of Prisons 2006).** This guide provides detailed instructions for setting up a center and includes practical guidance about space, location, resources, and activities.

***Occupational Outlook Handbook* (U.S. Department of Labor 2008).** This handbook is a recognized source of career information. It provides a wealth of data about numerous occupations, including the nature of the work, working conditions, training and education requirements, career advancement, earnings potential, and job outlook.

***Career Guide to Industries* (U.S. Department of Labor 2008).** A companion to the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, this guide describes occupations, training

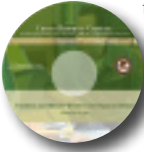
and advancement, earnings, expected job prospects, and working conditions for dozens of different types of industries, including educational services, health care, and motor vehicle and parts manufacturing.

Articles from *Occupational Outlook Quarterly* (U.S. Department of Labor). These brief and informative articles cover topics such as employment interviewing, job outlooks by level of education, available apprenticeships, creating résumés and cover letters, completing applications, and returning to the workforce after an absence.

Reentry guides. These guides from six states—Arizona, Georgia, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, and New York—are provided along with the *Employment Information Handbook* (U.S. Bureau of Prisons 2008) and *Offender Transition Program: Resource Manual* (McKean Re-Entry Initiative n.d.). Reentry guides assist offenders who are navigating their way from correctional facilities to the community, and serve as a valuable resource for criminal justice professionals and community-based service providers who are seeking to help offenders overcome barriers to employment. Although most of these guides focus on local resources, much of the content is relevant to other states and can be used to prepare reentry manuals elsewhere.

***Back to School: A Guide to Continuing Your Education After Prison* (Prisoner Reentry Institute 2007).**

Created with the support of the U.S. Department of Education (ED), this resource guide offers critical information and advice to offenders who are seeking to further their education upon release and includes forms that can be customized by jurisdiction, allowing it to be used nationally.



Most of the documents listed above (with the exception of the reentry guides) can be accessed by clicking on "Resource Library" on the main menu of this bulletin's companion DVD. The reentry guides may be accessed by clicking on "Getting Started" on the main menu.

Although suitable space and adequate resources are important elements of a career resource center, the effectiveness of a center also depends heavily on the quality of the supervision provided by staff members.

Staff members who supervise career resource centers must be prepared to help offenders make informed career decisions based on their abilities, aptitudes, and interests. To that end, they should have a basic understanding of career theory, good interpersonal skills, and the ability to administer basic interest inventories where required. They also must be knowledgeable about sources of labor market information and familiar with the full range of job search strategies and techniques. They should have a comprehensive understanding of the barriers to employment faced by offenders and know how to help them overcome those obstacles. Because group instruction is a cost-effective way of providing information and guidance, they should also possess good presentation skills.

One of the major things I learned in operating a career resource center is that inmates need somebody to guide them on how to use the resources to their best advantage.

—Joyce Reimherr
Reentry Employment Services Coordinator
MontgomeryWorks
Montgomery County Jail, Boyds, MD

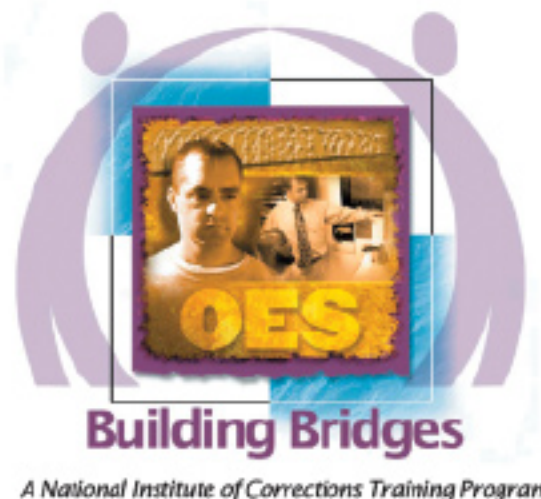
There are many no-cost avenues for acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to provide offender workforce development services through a career resource center. The National Institute of Corrections' (NIC's) Learning Center offers an e-learning program, ***Women and Work: Gender Responsivity and Workforce Development* (2008: NIC Accession Number 023218)**. This state-of-the-art instructional course can be taken from office or home using a computer and the Internet and allows users to work at their own pace. Visit the Learning Center's website at <http://nic.learn.com> for more information on how to access this learning opportunity.

Other no-cost avenues for acquiring knowledge and skills include:

***Building Futures: Offender Job Retention Distance Learning Training* (2002: NIC Accession Number 017699 or 018596)**. This 32-hour satellite/Internet broadcast explains the skills, strategies, and resources necessary to address job retention issues and increase employment success for individuals with criminal records. The broadcast is available on CD-ROM. To obtain this multi-DVD/CD set, call the NIC Information Center at 800-877-1461 or e-mail asknic@nicic.gov.

***OES: Building Bridges* (2006: NIC Accession Number 021698)**. This multimedia curriculum for offender employment specialists highlights best practices from around the country and is intended to serve a broad audience, including criminal justice agencies, community-based organizations, and faith-based service providers.

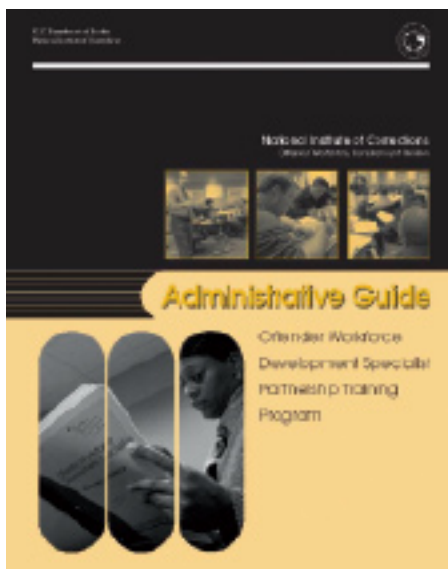
The curriculum uses the same techniques employed by television news programs like *20/20* or *60 Minutes*.



OES: Building Bridges (2006: NIC Accession Number 021698), a multimedia curriculum, features a variety of OES (Offender Employment Specialist) professionals discussing best practices and identifying strategies for improving outcomes in offender employment.

Field reporters visited correctional facilities, One-Stop Career Centers, businesses, and community- and faith-based organizations seeking best practices and interviewing practitioners who are helping offenders find and maintain employment. The 3-day curriculum incorporates more than 5 hours of video and explains how to improve employment outcomes through collaboration, assessment, job readiness, and job development. A free copy of the curriculum may be obtained by calling the NIC Information Center at 800-877-1461.

Offender Workforce Development Specialist (OWDS) Partnership Training Program. This competency-based training program is offered by invitation only to teams of 12 people from multiple agencies. Modules of instruction include career development theory and application, understanding and using facilitation skills, the role of assessment in career planning and job placement, instruction and group facilitation, designing and



Administrative Guide: Offender Workforce Development Specialist Partnership Training Program (2007: NIC Accession Number 022173) provides an overview of NIC's training for staff working in career resource centers.

implementing training and work development services, barriers to employment, ethics and the career development facilitator, transition interventions for the offender population, job seeking and employability skills, job retention, and the role of information and computers in career planning. Partnership between criminal justice agencies and community-based organizations is a key criterion for acceptance into this program. To obtain more information about this curriculum and the application process, visit NIC's website at www.nicic.gov/owd. An overview of the OWDS Partnership Training Program may be found in *Administrative Guide: Offender Workforce Development Specialist Partnership Training Program* (2007: NIC Accession Number 022173).

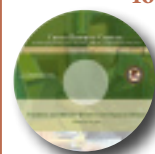
The OWDS Partnership Training Program gave me a good, sound basis for understanding the importance of the employment resource centers, and it also gave me a vision of where I want our employment resource center to go. So it gave me the tools that I needed to understand it, implement it, and see it through; but it also gave me enough of a vision to not just be satisfied with what I had, but to seek out more.

—Tracy Longacre
Educational Specialist
Federal Correctional Institution, Otisville, NY

Career resource center managers who seek to improve the life skills of offenders have several no-cost resources at their disposal. These resources include the curriculum materials used by the Vermont Department of Corrections' Workforce Development Program. Developed with the support of a grant from ED and based on *Habits of Mind: A Developmental Series* (Costa and Kallick 2000), the Workforce Development Program uses a holistic, strengths-based approach to promote offender development.

The program teaches offenders fundamental life skills in educational, work, and living-unit settings and assists them with their career planning and employment efforts. The program manual for this research demonstration project, the Habits of Mind curriculum, and a strengths-based supervision curriculum for staff can be found on the companion DVD for this document. Additional information about the Vermont Department of Corrections' Workforce Development Program can be found at www.chsvt.org/wdp.html and in NIC's Transition and Offender Workforce Development bulletin, *Creating a Workforce Development Culture To Reduce Reincarceration* (2009: NIC Accession Number 023065).

Another resource available to federal, state, and local government agencies is the Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program. This curriculum includes the *Veterans Incarcerated Employability Workshop* (n.d.) and an instructor's/facilitator's guide. Produced by DOL's Veterans' Employment & Training Service and the National Learning Center at the University of Colorado at Denver, this curriculum offers practical guidance to offenders who are seeking employment; it is available on this bulletin's companion DVD. Requests for copies of the curriculum can be made to the U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans' Employment & Training Service, attention Stanley Seidel, at 410-767-2110 or seidel.stanley@dol.gov.



You may access the curriculum materials used by the Vermont Department of Corrections' Workforce Development Program and the Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program by clicking on "Resource Library" on the main menu of this bulletin's companion DVD.

Working With Inmate Career Clerks

If there is a secret to our success, it's that we treat people with respect. When they walk through that door, we look them in the eye, we shake their hand, and we call them by name. We don't make promises we can't keep, and everyone leaves with something.

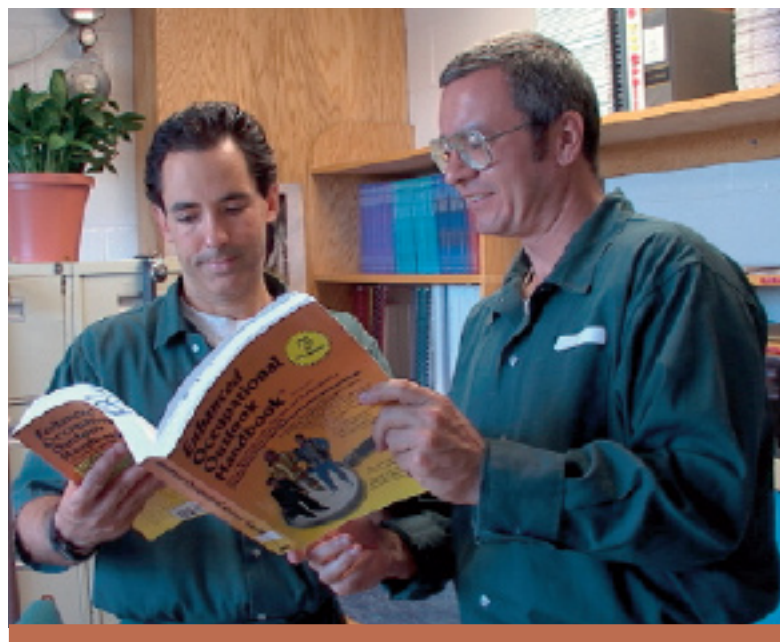
—Inmate Career Clerk
Employment Resource Center
Federal Correctional Institution, Loretto, PA

The value of using peer support for promoting personal change has long been recognized by the treatment and self-help communities. People who have had similar life experiences are in a good position to help each other manage challenging situations and promote personal responsibility. In jails and prisons, inmate peer support also provides value by extending the service delivery capacity of overstretched systems in a cost-effective way.

The involvement of offenders in providing career resource center services is gaining momentum in correctional systems that are strained by the increasing demand for reentry services. Inmate career clerks can be found in federal and state facilities, where they are playing an important role in service delivery. Tracy Longacre views the deployment of inmate career clerks as an absolute necessity. “I could not run a career resource center by myself,” she reports. Longacre has found that the deployment of inmate career clerks provides her with the time needed to develop resources in the community, thus extending her capacity to deliver reentry services.

Inmate career clerks must be carefully selected to ensure that they have the capacity to deliver services to a diverse group of peers. They must also have the skills needed to provide their peers with career-related assistance and connect them with resources inside and outside the career resource center. Training is required to ensure that they have these skills and understand their role and responsibilities.

In recognition of this training need, NIC has developed **Career Resource Centers (2005: NIC Accession Number 020931)**, a multimedia instructional program designed to provide inmates with the skills necessary to deliver essential services in a career resource center. The self-paced instructional program features videos, a printable workbook with “homework” assignments, and



In correctional facilities, inmate peer support promotes personal change and provides value by extending the service delivery capacity of overstretched systems in a cost-effective way.

computerized quizzes that measure comprehension of the instructional material. Although the program was designed to train inmates, it can also be used to provide instruction to volunteers working in career resource centers.

The instructional program is part of a multi-DVD/CD set that also includes the following resources:

Staff Handbook. This handbook provides career resource center staff with a basic overview of career resource centers and offers practical guidance on selecting inmate career clerks, strategies for marketing services, and methods for evaluating the effectiveness of the program.

Clerk Guide. This guide explains the goals, duties, and responsibilities of a career clerk and provides an overview of resources for career planning and employment.

Participant Workbook. This workbook guides offenders through an eight-step career-planning process. It includes practical guidance for every step of the career-planning process, a comprehensive set of worksheets and activity assignments, and quizzes to measure comprehension of the written material.

Facilitator's Notes. This guide provides comprehensive assistance to facilitators who use the *Participant Workbook* with offenders.

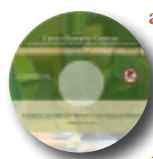


Career Resource Centers (2005: NIC Accession Number 020931), a multi-DVD/CD set developed for correctional facilities establishing a career resource center, includes a computer-assisted career clerk training program, career information videos, and career assessment tools.

Career Exploration Videos. This DVD contains 180 career information videos developed for DOL. All of the videos are closed-captioned and accessible through an easy-to-use menu. The videos introduce the user to a wide variety of occupations and are an excellent way to start the career exploration process.

O*NET Interest Profiler. Developed by DOL, the O*NET Interest Profiler tool helps offenders discover the types of work activities and occupations that are best suited to their personal interests and skills. The instrument consists of 180 items describing work activities that represent a wide variety of occupations and a broad range of training levels.

To order the *Career Resource Centers* multi-DVD/CD set, contact the NIC Information Center at 800-877-1461 or e-mail asknicic@nicic.gov. The O*NET Interest Profiler is also available online at www.onetcenter.org/IP.html.



To learn more about the role that inmate career clerks are playing in correctional institutions and to watch a video preview of the inmate career clerk training program, click on "Working With Inmate Clerks" on the main menu of this bulletin's companion DVD.

Building Community Ties

The biggest challenge is to break down the attitudes that separate us. The prison walls create a sort of artificial sense of separation, when, in fact, we are completely interdependent. What goes on inside the walls drastically affects what happens in the community.

—Mike Lindsey
Grant Coordinator
Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative
Colorado Department of Corrections

A career resource center should not be viewed as an isolated oasis of resources where offenders simply obtain guidance and instruction. Rather, it should be viewed as a vehicle for integrating services provided by the host agency with community-based programs and the One-Stop Career Center employment system. The center should engage a full spectrum of stakeholders, including but not limited to correctional, probation, and parole officers; teachers; community-based agencies and One-Stop Career Center service providers; employers; the faith-based community; and the families of offenders.

Partnership building involves breaking down the barriers that exist between criminal justice agencies and the community, a process that requires a proactive approach, especially when developing collaborations with the workforce development community.

"The collaboration and partnerships need to be engaged initially through county or local workforce development boards," advises Arthur Wallenstein, Director of the Montgomery County, MD, Department of Correction and Rehabilitation. "One needs to lay siege to that area, to get down to their board meetings, to bring the people into the correctional environment, to let them know that this is part of their client population, and it needs to be engaged. I would always start with community-based workforce development programs and then invite the folks in and let it develop from there." Wallenstein firmly believes in the power of partnerships, stating that "Collaboration is the only way to proceed. You have to merge together different funding streams, such as local workforce development, the Department of Labor, county government, and volunteers. This does not have to be an expensive undertaking. Remember, the broader the collaborative environment, the greater the opportunity for success."

In the Montgomery County Correctional Facility, the potential of these partnerships was demonstrated by the establishment of a satellite One-Stop Career Center within the walls of the jail. The satellite One-Stop is sponsored by the local Workforce Investment Board and is an integral part of the community's workforce development system.

MontgomeryWorks, the publicly funded agency charged with meeting the workforce development needs of the county's job seekers and employers, is a full partner in the effort and provides a wide range of services to offenders in the correctional facility, including one-on-one counseling, workshops, and assistance in using the agency's employment resources. The partnership is viewed as a source of motivation for inmates at the jail. Reentry Employment Services Coordinator Joyce Reimherr explains that it is often difficult for inmates to see that they can make a living through work. "It . . . [has] helped for them [to] see [that] they can work with the One-Stop Career Centers in the community, which can support them in obtaining training, advancing their education, and advancing to higher skill jobs and better pay."

To ensure that the education and training provided to people in prison and jail corresponds with the prevailing job market, it is critical that corrections officials work closely with community-based workforce and employment service providers. Partnerships between corrections agencies and these organizations will ensure that program participants are receiving skills and training geared toward available jobs within the community to which they will return upon release.

**—Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council:
Charting the Safe and Successful Return of
Prisoners to the Community (2005)**

Although a high level of cooperation between the workforce development system and a correctional agency tends to be the exception rather than the rule, there is a growing interest in forming these partnerships, and the establishment of a career resource center offers many opportunities for furthering these types of collaborations. Additional evidence of these collaborations and their benefits can be found in the New Mexico Corrections Department. Catherine Rose, the State Coordinator for Career Pathways and Reentry Programs, reports that their partnership with DOL



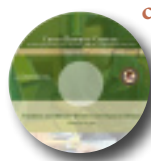
Instruction in the career-planning process is an important element in preparing offenders for making the transition to the workforce. Equally important is a close collaboration between correctional agencies and community-based organizations.

ensures that program participants released to the community are referred to specially trained job developers. According to Rose, "This really removes one of the barriers that offenders are most concerned about: finding employers that will hire a person with a felony in his or her background." Rose reports that this collaboration has resulted in a 79-percent employment rate for program participants.

As is the case in the development of any collaboration, face-to-face contact is an important first step. Denis Porter, Cognitive Programs Manager for the New Mexico Corrections Department, strongly recommends that correctional facility staff take the time to visit the local One-Stop Career Center and "meet the people who are going to be providing services to inmates when they transition." He believes that visits to One-Stop Career Centers also provide insight into how a full-service career center operates and can serve as a model for career resource centers in correctional facilities.

Partnerships should also be formed with community-based organizations and faith-based groups that can support the activities of the career resource center. When developing these partnerships, it is essential to determine each potential partner's capacity to deliver workforce development services to the offender population.

Where required, these partnerships should be supported with training and guidance. In Montgomery County, MD, the faith-based community was provided with instruction on career exploration, résumé preparation, and job search strategies, creating a pool of skilled volunteers who can provide services both at the correctional facility and in the community. Robert Green, the warden of the Montgomery County Correctional Facility, reports that their partnership with the faith-based community extends the services provided by paid staff without “any additional burden on the taxpayer.”



To learn more about the role that career resource centers can play in building partnerships, click on “Building Community Ties” on the main menu of this bulletin’s companion DVD. This section features practitioners discussing how they built successful community partnerships and also includes documents that can support efforts at collaboration building.

Role of Assessment in Career Resource Centers

Helping offenders make informed decisions about their future is an important element of the reentry process and increases the chances of long-term career success. Although one-on-one interviews or group activities can be used to help offenders make these decisions, assessment instruments can greatly facilitate the process. Assessment instruments help offenders learn about their interests, values, and skills and identify matching job opportunities. These instruments typically assess the individual’s attitudes toward work activities and values that play an important role in job satisfaction. The O*NET Interest Profiler and the O*NET Work Importance Profiler are examples of assessment instruments that can be administered in career resource centers.

The O*NET Interest Profiler provides users with an accurate, reliable profile of their vocational interests while simultaneously fostering career awareness and providing a window onto the world of work. Because this highly regarded instrument is available at no cost, it has great appeal for career resource centers that have limited budgets. One of the correctional agencies using this instrument is the Colorado Department of

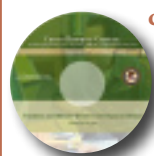
Corrections, which initiated its career resource centers through a grant from ED’s Life Skills for State and Local Prisoners Program. Inmates are encouraged to think about careers by working through the O*NET Interest Profiler and completing step-by-step career plans. This planning helps ensure that inmates will have the necessary skills to successfully find and keep a job after they are released, as illustrated in this comment by Riley Diana, Life Skills Reentry Teacher at one of Colorado’s career resource centers: “It allows me to get to know the offender in a closed environment while they are still incarcerated. We can focus on them doing a lot of planning toward peripheral services they will need for themselves.”

The O*NET Work Importance Profiler is a computerized self-assessment career exploration tool that allows job seekers to focus on what is important to them in a job. It helps individuals identify occupations that they may find satisfying, based on the similarity between their work values (such as achievement, autonomy, and conditions of work) and the characteristics of the occupations.

The O*NET Interest Profiler and the O*NET Work Importance Profiler are included in NIC’s training program for inmate career clerks, *Career Resource Centers* (2005: NIC Accession Number 020931). The instruments may also be downloaded from the O*NET Resource Center at www.onetcenter.org.

Another example of a no-cost assessment instrument is CareerZone, a Web-based career exploration tool developed by the New York State Department of Labor. Because correctional facilities typically do not allow inmates to access the Internet, the Department of Labor partnered with the New York State Department of Correctional Services and community-based organizations to produce a CD version that can be installed on stand-alone computers.

Based on O*NET’s database, the CD version provides assessment instruments (the O*NET Interest Profiler, the O*NET Work Importance Profiler, and a skills checklist matched to occupations); selected career videos; a searchable list of occupations based on specified criteria; and numerous other resources. Although the program was designed for use in New York State correctional facilities, most of the tools and instruments are applicable to offender workforce development efforts nationwide.



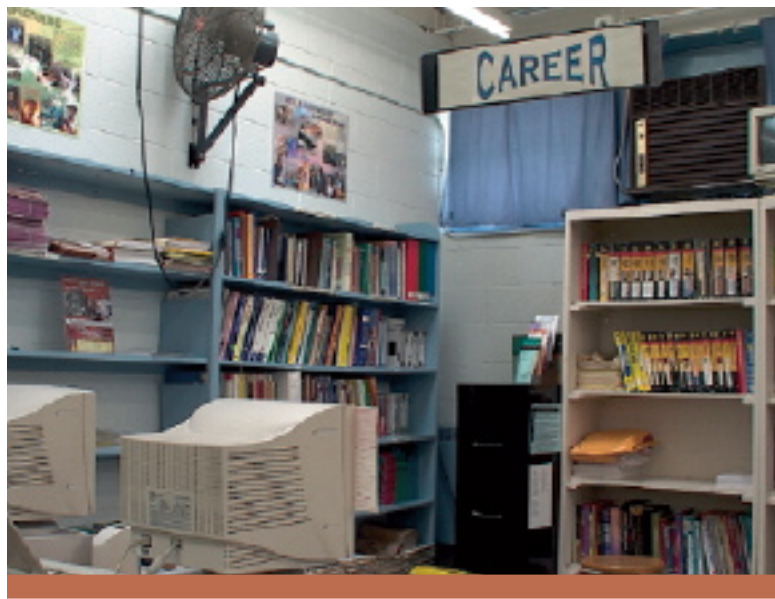
A complete version of the CareerZone program designed for installation on a local computer can be found by clicking “Assessment and Case Planning” on the main menu of this bulletin’s companion DVD. Also included are additional resources to facilitate the use of assessment instruments in career resource centers.

Technology Resources

In recent years, computer technology has greatly enhanced the delivery of career planning services. This technology serves three broad purposes in career planning. First, computers can be used to administer inventories of interests, skills, abilities, and values and can produce customized reports instantaneously. The O*NET Interest Profiler is an example of this type of application. Second, computers can be used to quickly access large databases of information on careers, education and training opportunities, and community resources. An example of this type of application is America’s Career Infonet, www.careerinfonet.org, a DOL-sponsored website that offers occupation and industry information, salary data, and education resources, all of which are drawn from large and frequently updated databases. Third, computers can be used to provide self-paced individual instruction. The computerized instruction program for training inmate career clerks described earlier in this document is an example of this type of application.

Although each of the three functions described above can be performed on a stand-alone computer, virtually all workforce development applications have migrated to the Internet, where they are available at no cost. The web-sites sponsored by DOL, for example, offer online career assessment services; information about careers, labor market trends, and educational resources; and interactive tools that provide instruction on a wide variety of subjects related to career exploration and the job search.

Each state provides similar services along with a job bank that matches job seekers with available opportunities in the community. Because it would be difficult to replicate these functions on a stand-alone computer and keep them up to date with the latest labor market information, it is extremely advantageous to access them directly on the Internet.



In recent years, computer technology has become an essential element in any career resource center. Computers can be used to administer inventories of interests, skills, abilities, and values and provide self-paced individual instruction.

Internet access in correctional facilities poses considerable security challenges for jail and prison administrators, who must balance security and public safety concerns with the need to provide cost-effective reentry services to the inmate population. In response to these competing needs, several approaches have emerged.

Typically, staff are provided with access to the Internet, and they serve as intermediaries between inmates and the information available on the Web. This approach maintains a high level of security but imposes an enormous burden on staff, who must process requests, seek information on the Internet, and then provide the information to the offender.

Another approach is to simulate access to the Internet on a local computer and allow inmates to access this information and related applications directly. New York State has adopted this approach using a specially designed version of CareerZone, an application that can be found on this document’s companion DVD.

In Maryland, a DVD tutorial, *Discovering the Internet @ Your Library* (2006), was developed to promote the public library as a place to access information resources following release from correctional facilities. The DVD highlights the information available on the Internet and teaches inmates how to use the resource upon their

return to the community. To order the DVD, contact the Maryland Department of Education, Correctional Education Libraries, at 410-767-0493.

Although this approach imposes less of a burden on staff and teaches offenders an important technical skill, computer simulations have their limitations. It takes a significant amount of time to develop applications for local computers, and by the time these applications are completed, the information they contain may be dated; given the enormous amount of career-related information available on the Internet, it would be impossible to transfer all of it to a local computer and keep it up to date on a regular basis.

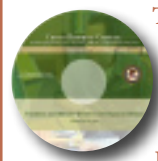
A third approach is being used at the Montgomery County Correctional Facility, where inmates are allowed direct access to career-related websites under the close supervision of correctional staff and employees of MontgomeryWorks. Warden Robert Green emphasizes that the Internet can be an effective and safe tool for assisting inmates to meet the challenges of life after incarceration:

We have to teach individuals who are leaving this system, going out into the real world, what the Internet can do for them. It's a powerful tool. Of course we don't want free Internet access by our inmate population, but done in a controlled environment, with a controlled group of people, it poses absolutely no security risk to this facility.

It's about oversight, it's about collaboration, it's about making sure that the system is locked down, and then going back in behind people doing a reasonable amount of quality control and security check. Today's systems will very easily tell you where an individual has been and what they're doing. We're basing judgments on the 10 or 20 percent that will misuse it or attempt to misuse it, but we can't forget about the 80 to 90 percent that are absolutely going to benefit from this service.

Thirty days before release, all inmates are given the opportunity to receive a "welcome home" orientation through DOL's One-Stop Career Center representative. Joyce Reimherr explains the importance of the One-Stop Career Center as a source of support for inmates as they make the transition back into the community:

"We encourage them to come to the One-Stop Career Center in the community. We develop positive feelings about using that center—that it is going to be a base of support for them. That's really where the rubber meets the road."



To learn more about how practitioners use technology to support career resource center activities, click on "Technology Resources" on the main menu of this bulletin's companion DVD.

Finding Champions and Overcoming Resistance

The introduction of a career resource center into a correctional facility, a parole or probation office, or a community-based organization often represents a fundamental shift in the way offenders are engaged in the reentry process. Career resource centers encourage offenders to become active rather than passive participants in their transition to the community and to focus attention on their long-term workforce development needs. It also requires the proactive development of partnerships with community-based agencies, many of which may be unfamiliar with the needs of the offender population. This change may not always be embraced by staff who have become accustomed to providing services within a framework that does not encourage self-reliance or focus on long-term career goals. Staff may also be reluctant to work with a broad range of community partners, especially if the new partners have little experience with the offender population.

People seldom embrace change. However, resistance to change is normal, and it must be anticipated and acknowledged. Managers who are setting up career resource centers must be prepared to win over skeptics and generate enthusiasm for the change process. The concerns of staff must be acknowledged and responded to accordingly.

In the New Mexico Corrections Department, policy-makers decided that career resource centers would be located in each facility's library, an idea that initially was not well received by the librarians. "At the beginning, I was resistant. I was one of those who said, 'Why should I give up space? Why should I have a computer in here? We have other people who can do it,'" explains Legal

Access Monitor and Head Librarian Vince Wiggins. “What changed my attitude and my mind was the very explanation of how librarians fit into the bigger picture of educating and furthering the careers of inmates so we don’t keep seeing them come back, and back, and back. That really made a difference to me and to my fellow librarians.”

To Wiggins, the career resource center brought an unanticipated benefit: “The career resource center opens up the possibility of interacting with inmates on a level that we don’t get to interact [on] otherwise. It’s different than, ‘This is the encyclopedia, and here is how to use it.’ You can actually guide them in something [the career planning process] that may make a major difference to their lives.”

The effectiveness of a career resource center in a correctional facility depends heavily on “communication champions” to keep staff and inmates engaged and satisfied. A representative of the career resource center should use his or her communication skills to inspire people by encouraging ownership of strategies and results. At the Otisville, NY, Federal Correctional Institution, Tracy Longacre builds support for the employment resource center she manages by participating in orientation sessions for new staff and teaching a unit in the annual training refresher courses that informs all staff about the role of the center and its services.

Gail Oliver, the Education Bureau Chief for the New Mexico Corrections Department, also emphasizes the need for communication. She reports spending a great deal of time talking to staff about the vision of career resource centers. “We talk to everyone,” Oliver reported. “We show them what it is and how it doesn’t breach security, how it meets the need of the offender, and how it meets the needs of the community. You have to get your message out. You have to be a champion [of] your cause.”



To learn more about finding champions and overcoming resistance to change, click on “Getting Started” on this bulletin’s companion DVD; then click on “Dealing With Staff Concerns” and “Communication Champions.” These sections feature video interviews with practitioners who have overcome resistance to change and an article from NIC’s library on transformation leadership.

Future Directions

The use of offender career resource centers in criminal justice agencies is a relatively new strategy and its full potential has yet to be realized. Many agencies are piloting new approaches to the delivery of career-related services to offenders, many of which are unique and offer an interesting glimpse into what the future may hold.

The U.S. Probation Office in the District of Nevada, in partnership with the U.S. Pretrial Services Office and local residential reentry centers, recently initiated Employment Development Corners. Located in the lobbies of the Probation Office’s Reno and Las Vegas facilities, the Employment Development Corners have stand-alone computers and printers that offer defendants and offenders resources for assessing their skills, abilities, and interests; preparing résumés and obtaining information about employment opportunities; and connecting with DOL’s One-Stop Career Centers.

In addition, each Employment Development Corner highlights education, resources, and upcoming events. “The project’s goal is to have defendants and offenders complete the interest profiler assessment at their first contact with the Pretrial Services or Probation Office,” notes Barbara Hunt, U.S. Probation Officer, Nevada. “The information gathered may be included in their pretrial files and presentence reports. We also share this information with the Federal Bureau of Prisons and supervision officers to help offenders with future vocational goals.”

In Maryland, a Transition Mobile Unit, a long-held vision of that state’s correctional educators and librarians, travels to correctional facilities across the state and provides information about resources to support offender employment and successful transition to the community. “We are focusing on taking the mobile unit to Maryland’s prerelease centers, which tend to be more accessible in terms of inmate movement—they [inmates] go out on work release to jobs in the community—and the facilities tend to be smaller and have fewer resources,” explains Dianne Bailey, Workforce Development Coordinator for the Maryland State Department of Education. “We may have classrooms there, but our prerelease sites tend not to have occupational programs and have very limited library or staff with Internet access to information that is necessary for reentry.”

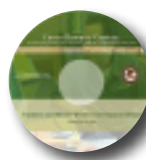


Many state agencies are piloting innovative approaches to the delivery of career-related services to offenders. In Maryland, a Transition Mobile Unit travels to correctional facilities across the state and provides information about resources to support offender employment.

Bailey explains how Internet access on the Transition Mobile Unit facilitates the provision of career-related services: “If we have career resource center staff who are co-located, as we do at some of our facilities, they will be able to register the recommended inmates for the Maryland Workforce Exchange, which is the Maryland-based labor market information as well as job bank—and perhaps even down the road be able to set up job interviews before they have even left the institutional gates.”

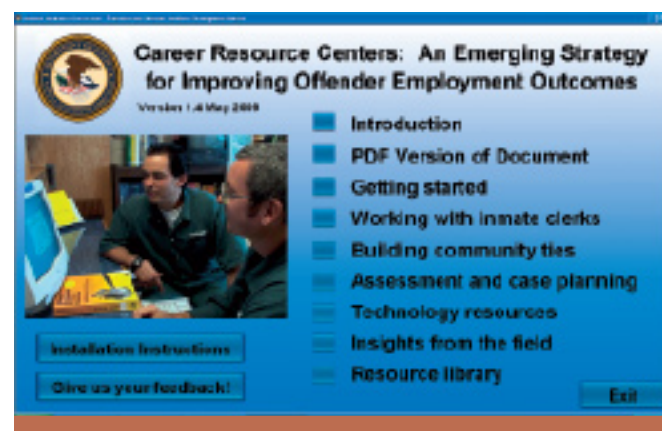
No matter what approach is taken to the delivery of career-related services to offenders, there is a clear and compelling need to ensure that prisoners are ready after their release to access and fully benefit from the nation’s workforce development system. This will require criminal justice agencies to begin employment-related services at the earliest possible opportunity and to ensure that these services are aligned with the nation’s workforce development system. The alignment of these services offers the potential to eliminate the costly duplication of effort, an important consideration given the budgetary constraints faced by most government agencies. It also offers the opportunity to leverage resources that are needed to improve the reentry prospects of offenders.

Criminal justice systems alone do not have adequate resources to help offenders secure and maintain long-term employment. However, if they can develop partnerships and collaborations with the One-Stop system and community-based agencies in support of their work, the likelihood of successful reentry outcomes is greatly increased. As demonstrated by the examples provided in this bulletin, career resource centers offer an excellent opportunity for building these partnerships.



Additional guidance on developing and supporting offender career resource centers can be found by clicking on “Insights From the Field” on the main menu of this bulletin’s companion DVD.

Using the Companion DVD



The companion DVD is compatible with the Windows operating system and supports the AutoPlay feature. Simply insert the DVD into the DVD-ROM drive and wait for the opening menu screen (shown here) to appear.

If the AutoPlay program does not start automatically, insert the DVD into the DVD drive, double click the “My Computer” icon on the Windows desktop, double click the “DVD drive” icon, and click the “Autorun.exe” icon.

When using the program, please do not double click on listed menu items; click once and wait for the screen or video to load. Although this program was designed to work from the DVD, better performance may be obtained by installing the software on your computer’s hard drive. To do this, click “Installation Instructions” on the main menu.

Additional Resources

NIC's Transition and Offender Workforce Development (T/OWD) Division is the primary source of training tailored specifically for providers of employment services for people with criminal records. NIC has developed products, programs, and services that meet the diverse needs of offender employment service providers. These resources are available at no cost by contacting the NIC Information Center (800-877-1461; asknicic@nicic.gov.). In addition, many resources may be viewed, downloaded, and/or ordered from the NIC website; go to www.nicic.gov, click on "Library," and enter the title or NIC Accession Number of the resource you wish to access. E-learning training can be accessed at <http://nic.learn.com>.

Publications

***Gender-Responsive Strategies: Research, Practice, and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders* (2003: NIC Accession Number 018017).** This report indicates that gender-responsive practice can improve outcomes for female offenders by considering their histories, behaviors, and life circumstances. It concludes by offering guiding principles and strategies for improving the system's response to female offenders. The intended audience ranges from decisionmakers at the legislative, agency, and system levels to those who manage or serve offenders on a daily basis.

***Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment: A Review and Discussion for Corrections Professionals* (2007: NIC Accession Number 021657).** This publication is intended to inform corrections and probation/parole professionals about the availability and benefits of cognitive-behavioral treatment services geared to the specific risks and needs of offender populations.

***Motivating Offenders to Change: A Guide for Probation and Parole* (2007: NIC Accession Number 022253).** In this guide, the authors lay out the foundations of motivational interviewing and give examples of how it can be implemented. Information is presented in a common-sense style that is easy to understand. The guide serves as a valuable prerequisite and aid to training in the use of this effective technique for facilitating positive offender change.

***Topics in Community Corrections, Annual Issue 2007: Promising Strategies in Transition from Prison* (2007: NIC Accession Number 022777).** This issue of *Topics in Community Corrections* is an outcome of knowledge sharing about the Transition from Prison to the Community (TPC) model. Several of the articles give a direct, hands-on account of the issues and challenges confronting agencies as they seek to make a significant difference in the ability of ex-offenders to stay out of the criminal justice system.

***TPC Reentry Handbook: Implementing the NIC Transition from Prison to the Community Model* (2008: NIC Accession Number 022669).** This handbook is a resource for a broad range of stakeholders involved in improving transition and reentry practices. The handbook presents the TPC model and summarizes the experiences and accomplishments of the eight states that have helped develop, improve, and bring the model to life. The handbook also presents the TPC implementation strategy that developed from the eight participating states.

***Creating a Workforce Development Culture To Reduce Reincarceration* (2009: NIC Accession Number 023065).** The first in a series of T/OWD bulletins, this publication features a correctional system that has infused a "workforce development culture" into a correctional environment that promotes behaviors, values, and communication norms consistent with a civilian workplace.

CD/DVD-ROM

***Simulated Online/Kiosk Job Application* (2008: NIC Accession Number 022996).** This CD-based simulation training program is designed to help offenders prepare for computerized job applicant screening systems. It provides basic information about computerized employment applications, a printable worksheet that can be used to prepare offenders for using these systems, and a full-length interactive application with context-sensitive help.

Satellite/Internet Broadcasts

***Thinking for a Change: An Integrated Approach to Changing Offender Behavior* (2002: NIC Accession Number 018311).** This 32-hour broadcast program presents an advanced-level course that trains

facilitators to deliver the Thinking for a Change program to groups of offenders. Thinking for a Change integrates cognitive approaches for changing behavior by restructuring offenders' thinking and teaching prosocial cognitive skills.

A Model for Social Justice: Collaboration Between Faith-Based and Community Organizations and Corrections (2007: NIC Accession Number 022542).

This 3-hour distance learning satellite/Internet broadcast program examines the myths, realities, and benefits of collaboration between corrections and faith-based and community organizations.

Building Tomorrow's Workforce: An Effective Reentry Strategy (2008: NIC Accession Number 023255).

This 3-hour distance learning satellite/Internet broadcast program includes a diverse panel of corrections and workforce development professionals, including correctional administrators, policymakers, employers, community agency representatives, and correctional industries professionals.

Programs Offered by NIC's E-Learning Center

The resources listed below can be accessed at <http://nic.learn.com>.

Workforce Development and Women Offenders (2006). This e-learning training program is for service providers interested in workforce development issues specific to women offenders. It describes the typical

characteristics and external barriers that affect the employability of women offenders along with effective interventions.

Evidence-Based Practices for Supervisors (2008).

This program is designed for service providers whose daily responsibilities require direct interaction with offenders and whose agencies have made a commitment to implement evidence-based practices (EBP). The program highlights EBP principles, as well as the planning, implementation, and monitoring of EBP for supervisors.

Podcast

George Keiser of NIC Discusses the Relationship Between EBP and Employment (2009). This podcast provides an overview in lay language of the relationship between EBP and employment. The podcast is available at www.nicic.gov/owd.

T/OWD Website

The T/OWD website offers a wealth of information about NIC's products, programs, and services developed to assist professionals who provide direct services to offenders and ex-offenders. The website can be accessed at www.nicic.gov/owd.

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For More Information

To learn more about resources that can be used to develop or enhance a career resource center, contact:

National Institute of Corrections

Transition and Offender Workforce Development Division
320 First Street, NW
Washington, DC 20534
Francina Carter
Correctional Program Specialist
Tel.: 800-995-6423, ext. 40117
202-514-0117
E-mail: fccarter@bop.gov
Web site: www.nicic.gov/owd

U.S. Department of Education

Office of Vocational and Adult Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202-6450
John Linton, Director
Office of Correctional Education
Tel.: 202-245-6592
E-mail: john.linton@ed.gov

National Institute of Corrections Information Center

791 North Chambers Road
Aurora, CO 80011
Tel.: 800-877-1461
E-mail: asknicic@nicic.gov