

Proposal Narrative: Lazarus Foundation Second Chance Community Reentry Program

A. Description of the Need

The Lazarus Foundation of Mississippi proposes to address the critical reentry challenges facing individuals returning to communities throughout the state of Mississippi from state prisons, private correctional facilities, and regional jails. Mississippi has one of the highest incarceration rates in the nation, with over 17,000 individuals in state custody and approximately 12,000 returning to communities annually. The state's three-year recidivism rate stands at 35%, reflecting the significant challenges individuals face upon release.

Our proposed program will serve all 82 counties in Mississippi and is available to any individual who has been issued an MDOC number and their immediate families, regardless of whether they were incarcerated in state-operated prisons, private correctional facilities, or regional jails. This statewide approach addresses the reality that reentry challenges extend beyond urban centers to rural communities where resources are often even more limited.

Individuals returning to communities across Mississippi face multiple challenges, including:

- **Housing instability:** Over 60% of returning individuals report unstable housing situations within their first six months post-release, with rural areas facing particularly severe shortages of transitional and affordable housing.
- **Unemployment:** Employment rates for formerly incarcerated individuals are below 40% in the first year of release, with limited opportunities in economically distressed counties.
- **Limited educational attainment:** 65% lack a high school diploma or equivalent, limiting access to family-sustaining employment.
- **Substance use and mental health disorders:** Approximately 70% have substance use disorders, and 40% have co-occurring mental health conditions, with treatment access varying dramatically by county.
- **Digital exclusion:** Most returning citizens lack basic digital literacy skills required in today's workforce, particularly in rural areas with limited broadband access.
- **Legal barriers:** Many face ongoing legal issues including outstanding warrants, child support arrears, and license suspensions that impede successful reintegration.

Current reentry efforts in Mississippi include the Mississippi Department of Corrections' pre-release programming, the federal Reentry Program Office, and scattered community-based services. However, these services suffer from fragmentation, limited capacity, and insufficient continuity between pre-release

and post-release support. Many counties, particularly in rural areas, have minimal or no dedicated reentry services.

While some pre-release services exist, they are primarily focused on basic discharge planning rather than comprehensive reentry preparation. Post-release services vary considerably across the state, with most concentrated in urban centers, leaving significant service gaps in rural communities. The state's parole and probation systems are severely under-resourced with caseloads exceeding 100 individuals per officer, limiting their ability to provide meaningful supervision and support.

The Lazarus Foundation proposes to close these service gaps by implementing a comprehensive, statewide reentry program that provides continuity from pre-release through community stabilization. Our program will utilize the Ohio Risk Assessment System (ORAS), which is already administered by the Mississippi Department of Corrections, to identify moderate to high-risk individuals who could benefit from intensive services. Using this validated assessment tool, we will develop targeted interventions addressing criminogenic risk factors including antisocial attitudes, antisocial peers, family dysfunction, and substance use disorders. We have established a data-sharing agreement with MDOC that will facilitate access to assessment data for program participants, ensuring coordinated service planning across all facility types statewide.

B. Project Goals and Objectives

The Lazarus Foundation's Community Reentry Program seeks to create safer communities and improve outcomes for returning citizens throughout Mississippi through a comprehensive approach to reentry services. Our goals and objectives directly align with the purpose and requirements of the Second Chance Act and this funding opportunity.

Goal 1: Create safer and stronger communities statewide by improving reentry outcomes and reducing recidivism for individuals at moderate to high risk of reoffending.

Objective 1.1: Reduce recidivism among program participants by 40% compared to the state baseline rate over a three-year period.

Objective 1.2: Increase stable housing placement rates to 85% for program participants within six months of release.

Objective 1.3: Achieve employment rates of 75% for program participants within 12 months of program enrollment.

Goal 2: Develop strong partnerships between all correctional facilities and community stakeholders to ensure continuity of care.

Objective 2.1: Establish formal MOUs with Mississippi Department of Corrections, private correctional facilities, and regional jails to facilitate pre-release access and coordinated reentry planning.

Objective 2.2: Conduct joint monthly case conferences with corrections staff, parole/probation officers, and community providers for all active program participants.

Objective 2.3: Train 25 peer mentors statewide who have successfully navigated reentry to serve as community-corrections liaisons in their local areas.

Goal 3: Provide evidence-based programming that addresses criminogenic risks and responsivity factors across diverse communities.

Objective 3.1: Assess 100% of program participants using validated risk/needs tools and develop individualized case plans within 30 days of program enrollment.

Objective 3.2: Deliver cognitive-behavioral interventions to 100% of moderate and high-risk participants addressing criminogenic thinking patterns.

Objective 3.3: Match at least 90% of program participants with services that address their top three identified needs from assessment results, utilizing both in-person and teleservice delivery models to ensure statewide access.

Goal 4: Address systemic barriers that impede successful reintegration throughout Mississippi.

Objective 4.1: Provide civil legal assistance to 100% of program participants with legal barriers including record expungement, license restoration, and child support modification.

Objective 4.2: Develop digital literacy skills for 100% of program participants, including online job search, financial management, and telehealth navigation.

Objective 4.3: Connect 100% of eligible participants with benefits including Medicaid, SNAP, and housing assistance within 30 days of release.

These goals and objectives directly support the BJA's priority of implementing evidence-based practices to reduce recidivism and improve public safety. Our objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound, providing clear metrics for program evaluation and accountability.

C. Project Design and Implementation

The Lazarus Foundation will implement a comprehensive reentry program serving 150 individuals annually (450 over the three-year grant period) who are at moderate to high risk for recidivism based on ORAS assessment results. Our statewide approach will serve individuals with MDOC numbers returning to any of Mississippi's 82 counties, as well as their immediate families, regardless of whether they were incarcerated in state-run facilities, private prisons, or regional jails. Eligibility criteria include:

- Medium to high risk of recidivism as determined by ORAS
- Within 3-6 months of release from any correctional facility in Mississippi
- Returning to any county in Mississippi
- Voluntary participation and commitment to program requirements

Our program design incorporates a seamless continuum of services from pre-release through post-release stabilization, utilizing evidence-based practices at each stage and adapting service delivery methods to accommodate both urban and rural settings:

1. Pre-Release Engagement (3-6 months prior to release)

Our Early Engagement Team will work inside correctional facilities across the state to:

- Conduct supplemental needs assessments to identify specific service needs
- Develop individualized reentry plans in coordination with facility case managers
- Facilitate pre-release classes covering job readiness, cognitive-behavioral interventions, and life skills
- Complete benefit applications including Medicaid, SNAP, and housing assistance
- Begin family reunification planning and support connections

The team will conduct facility visits across the state, engaging approximately 25-30 new participants each month. We have secured written agreements with MDOC and are finalizing agreements with private and regional facilities to allow our staff to enter facilities and work directly with incarcerated individuals prior to release. For facilities in remote areas, we will utilize video conferencing when necessary to maintain regular contact.

2. Transition and Crisis Stabilization (0-3 months post-release)

Immediately upon release, participants will be connected with:

- Lazarus House transitional housing (40 beds in central hubs) for those without stable housing options
- Housing placement assistance utilizing our network of housing partners statewide
- Intensive case management with weekly meetings and 24/7 crisis support
- Immediate needs assistance including clothing, hygiene items, and transportation
- Legal services addressing documentation, record expungement, and child support
- Healthcare enrollment and connection to medical/behavioral health services
- Digital literacy training and technology access

Case managers will maintain a 1:15 ratio during this phase to provide intensive support during the critical first 90 days post-release. For participants in rural areas, we will utilize a combination of in-person visits and teleservice models to ensure consistent support. Each participant will receive an individualized stabilization plan and be assigned to appropriate evidence-based interventions.

3. Skill Development and Employment (3-12 months post-release)

The Lazarus Academy will provide structured programming including:

- Cognitive-behavioral interventions using Thinking for a Change curriculum
- Educational services including HiSET preparation and testing
- Vocational training in construction, welding, and digital skills
- Financial literacy and money management
- Peer support and recovery services for substance use disorders
- Family counseling and reunification support

Programming will be delivered through a combination of in-person services at our regional hubs and distance learning options for participants in remote areas. We will utilize community partners including community colleges, workforce centers, and faith-based organizations to deliver services in communities throughout the state. Case manager ratios will adjust to 1:20 during this phase, with continued weekly check-ins either in-person or virtually.

4. Community Integration and Self-Sufficiency (12+ months)

As participants stabilize, they will transition to:

- Employment through our social enterprises (On This Rock Construction and Lazarus Fabrication), our statewide employer network, or entrepreneurship opportunities
- Independent housing with aftercare support
- Alumni support network providing ongoing peer mentorship
- Leadership development opportunities within our programs
- Continued access to supportive services as needed

The case management ratio will adjust to 1:25 during this phase, with monthly check-ins and as-needed support.

Throughout all phases, we will use evidence-based interventions including:

- Cognitive Behavioral Interventions (Thinking for a Change)
- Motivational Interviewing

- Trauma-Informed Care approaches
- Contingency Management
- Recovery-Oriented Systems of Care for substance use disorders
- Moral Reconation Therapy

Our program model is built on the risk-need-responsivity framework, tailoring interventions to address each individual's criminogenic risk factors while being responsive to their learning styles, abilities, and strengths. The program incorporates continuous assessment and adjustment of service plans based on participant progress and challenges.

To ensure effective service delivery across Mississippi's diverse geography, we will utilize:

- Regional service hubs in strategic locations (Jackson, Hattiesburg, Tupelo, and Greenville)
- Mobile case management teams that travel to underserved areas
- Teleservices including virtual case management, telemedicine, and online education
- Local community partnerships to deliver services in participants' home communities

This hybrid approach allows us to maintain service quality and accessibility regardless of a participant's location within the state.

D. Capabilities and Competencies

The Lazarus Foundation of Mississippi brings 12 years of experience providing comprehensive reentry services to formerly incarcerated individuals throughout the state. Our organization is well-positioned to implement this statewide project through our established program infrastructure, experienced staff, and strong community partnerships across Mississippi.

Organizational Structure and Experience

The Lazarus Foundation operates a continuum of reentry services including transitional housing, vocational training, employment programs, and supportive services. Our organizational infrastructure includes:

- Lazarus House: Transitional housing programs with locations in Jackson, Hattiesburg, and Tupelo, with a demonstrated 85% success rate in housing stability
- Lazarus Academy: A comprehensive education and vocational training center with physical locations and distance learning options serving 200+ individuals annually across the state
- Two social enterprises (On This Rock Construction and Lazarus Fabrication) providing employment for program participants and generating revenue to support our mission
- Mobile service teams that provide outreach and support to rural communities

- Virtual service platforms that enable remote case management and program delivery

Our experience implementing federal grants includes successful management of previous BJA Second Chance Act funding (2018-2021), SAMHSA recovery support services grants, and Department of Labor employment programs covering multiple counties. Our programs have consistently met or exceeded performance targets with recidivism rates 50% lower than state averages among our participants.

Management Structure and Staffing

The proposed program will be managed by our Director of Reentry Services, James Washington, who brings 15 years of experience in corrections and reentry program management across Mississippi. Mr. Washington previously served as a unit manager with MDOC and has extensive knowledge of institutional operations and reentry challenges in both urban and rural settings. He will dedicate 75% of his time to oversee all aspects of the program.

Key project staff will include:

- Program Manager (100% FTE): Will provide day-to-day supervision of program operations and staff
- Regional Coordinators (4 positions at 100% FTE): Will oversee operations in each of our service regions
- Pre-Release Coordinator (100% FTE): Will lead facility-based services and coordinate with corrections staff statewide
- Reentry Case Managers (8 positions at 100% FTE): Will provide direct services to program participants across all regions
- Employment Specialist (100% FTE): Will coordinate job training and placement services
- Housing Coordinator (100% FTE): Will manage transitional housing operations and permanent housing placement statewide
- Civil Legal Attorney (100% FTE): Will address legal barriers to successful reentry
- Peer Support Specialists (6 positions at 100% FTE): Former program participants who will provide mentoring and support in their home communities

All staff members receive comprehensive training in evidence-based practices, motivational interviewing, trauma-informed care, and risk-need-responsivity principles. Our organization places high priority on recruiting staff with lived experience of incarceration, with 40% of our current team being directly impacted by the justice system. We also emphasize hiring staff who reflect the diverse communities we serve and who have connections to rural areas of the state.

Collaborative Partnerships

The Lazarus Foundation has established strong partnerships with key stakeholders essential to program success throughout Mississippi:

- Mississippi Department of Corrections: Formal MOU allowing pre-release access to all state facilities, data sharing agreements, and coordinated case planning
- Private correctional facilities: Partnership agreements for facility access and pre-release services
- Regional jails: Agreements for identification and pre-release services for jail populations
- Mississippi Department of Mental Health: Referral agreements for behavioral health services statewide
- Mississippi Department of Employment Security: Job placement and training resources in all workforce regions
- Local housing authorities: Housing voucher access and permanent housing placements across multiple counties
- Regional employers: Job placement commitments and employment partnership agreements across diverse industries
- Community colleges: Educational programming and credential pathways utilizing all 15 community colleges in the state
- Faith-based organizations: Local partners in communities throughout Mississippi providing volunteer support and facility space

Letters of support from these partners are included with our application, demonstrating their commitment to program participation and resource coordination across the state.

Demonstrated Success and Organizational Capacity

The Lazarus Foundation has demonstrated success in implementing similar programs statewide, with outcomes including:

- 85% housing stability rate among program participants
- 72% employment rate within 12 months of program completion
- 17% recidivism rate (compared to 35% state average) over three years
- 80% reduction in substance use among participants with SUD history
- 65% increase in family reunification and healthy relationship indicators

Our organization has robust financial management systems that comply with 2 CFR 200 requirements, as evidenced by clean annual audits. We utilize ETO (Efforts to Outcomes) performance management software to track participant progress, program outcomes, and grant compliance metrics across all service locations.

We have attached the Mandatory Chief Executive Assurance to Comply with Statutory and Program Requirements form signed by our Executive Director, confirming our commitment to upholding all program requirements and performance measures.