


TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT NOTICE	NO. 1-12
	DATE July 31, 2012

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FROM: JANE OATES 
Assistant Secretary

SUBJECT: New Research Report: *Evaluation of the Re-Integration of Ex-Offenders (RExO) Program: Interim Report*

1. Purpose. To announce the release and availability of a new Employment and Training Administration (ETA) research report entitled: *Evaluation of the Re-Integration of Ex-Offenders (RExO) Program: Interim Report*.

2. Background. In November 2005, ETA launched the Reintegration of Ex-Offenders (RExO) Initiative as a joint venture with the Department of Justice. The RExO Initiative was intended to strengthen communities greatly affected by large influx of formerly incarcerated individuals through employment-centered projects that incorporate education, job training, housing referrals, mentoring, and other comprehensive transitional services. The RExO Initiative design was based on the core premise that helping formerly incarcerated individuals find and maintain stable and legal employment will reduce recidivism and increase public safety. Recognizing that Faith-Based and Community Organizations (FBCOs) are well respected within their communities, have a long history of providing social services to some of the hardest-to-serve populations, are able to tap into sizable networks of volunteers, and have the enthusiasm to support their undertakings, ETA identified FBCOs as the entities to lead the local re-entry projects.

In June 2009, ETA contracted with Social Policy Research Associates to conduct a random assignment impact evaluation of the 24 RExO grantees that had been in operation for more than three years. A critical component of this evaluation is an implementation analysis, which includes data collected during two rounds of site visits to each of the 24 grantees and alternative providers in their communities. This report summarizes the key findings from this implementation analysis and provides some context for the upcoming impact analysis by presenting information about the labor market situation in the 24 communities in which

programs operated, the major barriers facing ex-offenders, the services available through the programs and the services available in the community.

3. Publication Description. This report details the 24 RExO grantees' significant achievements in implementing their RExO programs, which will hopefully contribute substantially to the understanding of the impacts of workforce-based reentry programs for ex-offenders. These achievements include: successfully mobilizing community partners to participate in program activities; providing case management and mentoring services, as well as other supportive services, and much-needed employment to thousands of ex-offenders; and implementing a random assignment study of over 4,600 ex-offenders.

4. Key Research Findings. Highlights of key findings include the following:

- Ex-offenders served under the RExO Initiative confronted employer biases, formal hiring policies that excluded them and less formal hiring practices that limited their employment opportunities.
- To the extent that ex-offenders found work, those opportunities came from within industries offering low-skill, low-pay jobs, and the employers tended to be smaller, local employers who often had experience with ex-offenders.
- The economic downturn placed additional barriers to employment on ex-offenders. Employers that previously hired ex-offenders subsequently had an abundant and overqualified pool of candidates vying for fewer jobs and were less willing to hire individuals with criminal backgrounds.
- Nearly all programs offered work readiness training as the core training activity. While this varied in intensity and duration across the 24 sites, the content generally included resume development, interviewing skills, and job search strategies.
- Approximately two-thirds of program participants engaged in mentoring activities, primarily group mentoring. While most other services provided by the grantees are available from other providers in each community, mentoring services—which were heavily promoted under the RExO Initiative—were the exception and were much less frequently available in grantee communities.
- Mentoring services were new to most grantees and were difficult to implement. One of the most challenging aspects of the mentoring program was recruiting volunteer mentors, many of whom were reluctant to work with ex-offenders.
- Barriers to employment posed serious challenges to placing ex-offenders in jobs. Lack of education, lack of work experience, unstable or transitional housing, transportation limitations, restrictions on movement due to terms of parole, and substance abuse issues presented the largest barriers to finding employment.
- Finally, all grantees were relatively weak in their focus on job development. Too often, RExO programs did not provide adequate support to the job development function, in both the training available to job developers and the staff support to ensure that this function was adequately addressed, only exacerbating an already challenging situation.

5. Inquiries. To view an abstract of this publication as well as to download the full report, visit the ETA Research Publication Database Web site at:
<http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/keyword.cfm>.