

The Joyce Foundation

Transitional Jobs Reentry Initiative Questions & Answers – February 2006

Initiative Purpose and Background

Q: What is the purpose of the initiative?

The purpose of the Initiative is to rigorously evaluate transitional jobs programs as a model for serving recently released, male offenders. At the end of the three year evaluation, we will release the results widely and hope in particular to inform the decision making of federal, state, and local policymakers.

The design and timing of this initiative was informed by many conversations that occurred last year with both practitioners and policy experts. There was general consensus from those that we talked with that there is not enough good data available about employment models that effectively serve male ex-offenders. In recent years, the Foundation has supported several outcome studies of transitional jobs programs that served welfare participants all of which showed promising results. We decided that it made sense at this stage to test whether the transitional jobs model could have a positive impact on employment and recidivism outcomes for male offenders.

Transitional Jobs

Q: What is the Foundation’s definition of a “transitional job”?

Transitional jobs programs are intended to help people who have a difficult time obtaining a job by providing them an opportunity to get work experience, skills, and help resolving other problems that make employers reluctant to hire them. A transitional job is a time-limited, substantive work experience for which the individual earns an hourly wage. The wage is typically subsidized by public or foundation dollars and in some cases by an employer. A transitional jobs program also includes intensive case management and job coaching, support services (e.g. transportation reimbursement, assistance/referral to help resolve issues such as child support arrearages and payments), and assistance finding an unsubsidized job after program completion. A transitional job is not one in which there is an expectation that the host will hire the individual after a trial period.

Q: Where should the transitional jobs be located?

The transitional job can be with a nonprofit, for-profit company, or public agency. Not all participants need to be placed in a transitional job in the same industry or at the same site. Programs may establish individual placements at sites throughout a community, can be part of a social enterprise such as a service business with a social mission, or can charge a fee for their services (e.g. a construction or clean up crew).

The National Transitional Jobs Network website (www.transitionaljobs.net) is a resource for further information about different transitional jobs program models.

Q: Does the participant have to be paid a certain amount?

All transitional jobs participants must at least earn a wage for the hours they work that meets minimum hourly wage requirements for your state. If your state does not have a minimum age requirement, the wage must meet federal requirements. You may pay a participant more than minimum wage.

Q: Is there a minimum number of hours that a participant must spend in a transitional job?

Although there was no explicit requirement included in the Request For Proposals regarding the number of hours a participant will work each week, the basic expectation is that participants in a transitional job program will work full-time (approximately 30-35 hours/week). We anticipate that wages from the transitional job will be the main source of income for most participants during their time in the program.

Q: Could the 30-35 hours per week work requirement include 15 hours at one job and 20 at another?

A successful transitional jobs program generally does not split an individual's time between sites to accumulate hours. Ideally, participants will get experience in a steady working environment. One exception might be if a person works at different construction sites. In all cases, the key is for participants to have a case manager and/or job coach who checks in with them on a regular basis to find out how the job is going and to help resolve other issues that might have arisen.

Q: Can the transitional job last longer than 3 months?

A participant may work in a transitional job for longer than 3 months if the provider can serve more than 50 individuals at one time. A total of at least 150 individuals have to be served within an 18 month timeframe. This timeframe and service requirement will not be extended for programs that provide a transitional job that is longer than 3 months.

Q: How specific should we be about what kinds of transitional jobs we can provide?

Be as specific as you can be at the time of your application.

Participant Eligibility

Q: Is the Initiative only targeting male offenders who have been released from prison or jail within the last three months?

Yes.

Q: Does the ex-offender have to live in the Midwest?

The ex-offender must reside in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, or Wisconsin. It is acceptable for the individual to participate in a transitional job or obtain unsubsidized employment that is in a bordering community in another state.

Q: Is there a minimum age requirement?

Yes, all participants must be at least 18 years old.

Q: Are there any restrictions regarding type of offense? Are there restrictions on whether this person has been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor?

There are no such restrictions. However, an individual must have been incarcerated.

Q: Is there a minimum length of stay that an individual has to have been incarcerated?

There is no minimum length of stay. However an individual who is detained in jail and then released without a conviction is not eligible.

Q: Would someone in an adult transitions center be able to participate?

It is acceptable for someone to live in a residential facility, but it is expected that they can participate fully in the program. Individuals in transition centers that have certain requirements around their time which prevent them from engaging in full-time employment would be ineligible.

Evaluation

Q: What kind of evaluation will be conducted as part of this Initiative?

The evaluation will include three components: 1) an impact analysis that will assess what difference the transitional jobs programs make; 2) an implementation analysis that will describe the programs and how they operate and get some in-depth information about the participants; and 3) a benefit cost analysis.

For the impact analysis, the Foundation has decided to use a random assignment design. That means people who meet the program eligibility requirements will be assigned, at random, to a “treatment” group that participates in the transitional jobs program, or to a “control” group that doesn’t participate in the transitional jobs program but will have access to a basic job readiness/job placement program. This means that everyone in both groups will have access to services designed to help them get employed. The evaluator will follow both groups for at least one year, and any differences that emerge between the groups – for example in employment rates or earnings – can be attributed to the transitional jobs program. Those differences are called impacts. Thus the evaluation will determine whether the transitional jobs and other special services that accompany them are more effective than a basic job readiness/job placement model.

Q: When will random assignment take place and who is responsible for making the assignments?

Random assignment could happen at the point of referral or at the point that people show up to a program office. However, because the evaluation will hope to pool together results from all sites, it is best if the process is similar across sites; once programs are chosen, the evaluator, referral source, and the programs themselves will need to coordinate this. Also, no matter how the process works, there will need to be a single point just prior to the random assignment when people hear a description of the study and sign a consent form indicating that they are willing to be part of the study.

Q: What participant outcomes will be measured?

Outcome measures will include labor market attachment, employment retention, earnings gains, and recidivism.

Q: What data will programs have to collect as part of the evaluation?

Program staff or their referral source will have to collect baseline demographic data on all participants. The evaluator will help to determine what data will be collected and will provide the tools needed to collect the data (e.g. paper forms or a computer-based data entry system). Programs will also need to track participation in all program activities.

Q: Will programs be required to collect outcome data on participants such as job retention?

No. The evaluator will track the outcomes of both groups using administrative records, specifically unemployment insurance (UI) quarterly earnings data and records from the criminal justice system. Thus, the study will be able to measure the programs’ impacts on employment and earnings in UI-covered jobs, plus arrests, convictions, and incarceration. There will be no survey, so it won’t be possible to measure employment that is off the books or not in UI-covered jobs, or other income sources like public assistance.

Q: What role will program staff play in the evaluation?

It is expected that each program will hire or support one or more staff people to serve as the research administrator. The research administrator will act as the liaison to the evaluator, help administer the random assignment process, arrange site visits for the research team, and maintain a management information system that accurately tracks participation in all key program activities. This person or people will be employed by the program, working under a job description agreed upon by the evaluator and the Foundation. If the research administrator's duties are held by one person, you should expect that these responsibilities will take a majority of his/her time.

Q: Is it permissible to subcontract for the research administrator position?

The research administrator will be an on-the-ground liaison to the evaluator, so this person would have to be at the site, ready to solve problems and set up interviews. It is acceptable to support this position through a full-time contract as long as the person has full access to the operations of the program and to organizational management.

Q: When will the evaluation results be complete and publicly available?

If random assignment of participants starts in January 2007 and lasts for about one year, and participants are followed for at least one year, the study period will go until at least December 2008. Given the usual lag in Unemployment Insurance wage data, final results will not likely be ready until mid-to-late 2009. However, the evaluator will produce some interim findings that can be shared with the sites – although they may not be made public.

Q: When will the evaluator be announced?

The Foundation hopes to announce the evaluator chosen for this Initiative in mid-April.

Q: Will there be one evaluator per site or one evaluator for all sites?

There will be one evaluator chosen by the Foundation that will work with all selected sites, in order to assure comparable results.

Q: Can we use our own evaluator?

No. The Foundation will fund an evaluator to carry out the research components of our initiative, so we would not fund an individual evaluator. If you already have an evaluator, that person would not do the evaluations for this project.

Program Capacity and Initiative Timeframe

Q: Would the Foundation consider a program/partnership that serves fewer than 400 people a year? Would we consider control and treatment groups of fewer than 200?

Between 150 and 200 participants must participate in the transitional jobs program and another 150-200 participants must receive job readiness/job placement services during the 18 months research period. A participant will not be counted as part of the 150-200 minimum requirement unless he works in a transitional job for at least 5 days. The foundation will not consider proposals to serve fewer numbers over longer periods of time.

Q: Do we need to start the control and treatment groups at the same time?

Both the transitional jobs program for the treatment group and the job readiness program for the control group should start around the same time. Participants should be randomly assigned and served simultaneously. The 50 slots do not have to be filled at exactly the same time and the programs' start and end dates do not have to be exactly the same.

Program Services for Treatment and Control Group

Q: How will participants be selected?

Programs themselves should determine how they will recruit participants and explain the process in the proposal. Neither the evaluator nor the Joyce Foundation will help programs find individuals to participate. An important part of the application is demonstrating that the provider can recruit an adequate number of people to meet the requirements of participation in both the control and the treatment group.

Q: Can services begin when the participants are still incarcerated?

A program can start working with participants while they are still incarcerated but the random assignment into control or treatment groups will probably need to happen at the point of or after release. Also, providers that propose such a model should provide a detailed description of the services offered during incarceration and the timeframe.

Q: Is there an advantage to having a single organization provide services to both the treatment group and the control group?

At the end of the evaluation the goal is to be able to determine whether the transitional jobs portion of the program is what made a difference to someone's outcome. If one organization provides both services, that organization can ensure that there is a distinction between the services to the control and treatment group, and that would be an advantage. If there are two organizations, the one serving the control group *may* be tempted to enhance those services beyond the basic model in order to improve outcomes. Still, the Foundation recognizes that not all programs have the capacity to provide services to both groups and therefore will entertain proposals from partnerships/collaborations.

Q: Would it be possible for us to subdivide the population into a targeted subset, for instance, ex-offenders with diagnosed disabilities?

It is permissible to subdivide populations as long as they are still randomly assigned. Programs would have to ensure that either employment model is appropriate for the population(s) participating in the study.

Q: Does the orientation and intake process need to be the same for both the treatment and control groups?

Intake and orientation processes for the two groups may be different. However, it is important that random assignment and baseline data be centralized.

Q: What are the program requirements for the control group?

The job readiness and placement services offered to the control group should not be extensive. These services might include, for example, information about how to identify job openings, help creating a resume, some tips on how to answer application questions, and referrals to basic services such as legal advice or medical assistance. The control group should not receive intensive, one-on-one job development services. It is important that the study be able to isolate the impact of the transitional jobs programs and this is harder to do if the control group is receiving a comprehensive set of services.

Q: Are there ethical concerns that a participant in the control group will be denied services they might otherwise get?

No. Some individuals in both the treatment and the control group might seek other services on their own accord. This is understandable. For the purpose of the study, it is important that the program model does not build in intensive services for the control group nor should every individual in the control group receive intensive services such as occupational training.

Q: What happens if a member of the control group loses his/her job and needs additional services?

If someone in the control group gets basic job readiness, gets a job and then loses it, they could come back to that job readiness program, but they couldn't go into the transitional jobs program. Nobody will cross over from the control group to the transitional jobs group by virtue of losing a job.

Q: What happens when a member of the treatment group becomes employed during the three-month period and then moves into an unsubsidized job?

It is often the case that an individual participating in a transitional jobs program finds unsubsidized employment. For the purposes of the evaluation, such an individual would be counted toward the required goal of serving 150-200 transitional jobs participants, as long as they have spent 5 days in the transitional job.

Q: How long can we work with participants after the completion of the transitional job?

It is up to the provider to determine how long they will work with an individual after placement into a subsidized job.

Q: What relationship must we have with government?

It is expected that all programs will have some relationship with government. The level of government, the specific department(s), and the nature of the relationship will differ depending on the program model. For example, government might be able to provide funding support, or the referral process might involve state corrections, county corrections, and/or parole. At minimum, the Foundation requires a letter of support that demonstrates that corrections/parole knows about and supports your proposal.

Funding and Budget

Q: What funding is available from the Foundation?

Each site will receive a grant of \$75,000 a year for two years, totaling \$150,000 to cover the staff costs related to participating in an evaluation. These funds can be used to hire a new staff person or reassign existing staff to serve as the research administrator. These funds will be re-granted by the evaluator. In addition, each program/partnership is eligible to request \$200,000 a year for three years in program operations funds. You should request these funds as part of your application.

Q: In the RFP you state that Joyce funds cannot exceed 40% of the program's operation costs. Could you clarify that?

Each applicant should prepare a budget that accurately and fully captures the costs of providing services to both the control and treatment groups and includes appropriate administrative costs. The Foundation funds will be granted based on the Foundation's assessment of the budget, and other projected revenue and will not exceed the lesser of \$200,000 or 40% of the total budget per year. Foundation money should not be used to fund services already covered by these sources or to supplant other funds. Foundation funds should be used to expand the capacity of a program or offer supplemental services.

Q: Who can provide the match funding?

The Foundation has had contact with all six Department of Corrections agencies and all six state departments were open to being approached by providers who want to seek additional funding. It is important to note that the Foundation cannot make a commitment on their behalf. Also, match funding may come from other sources or existing contracts.

Q: What should be included in the budget that is submitted with the proposal?

Organizations need to design a line-item project budget, indicating the costs of staff who will be involved, the percentage of their time is involved, and other costs including supportive services, materials, any subcontracts, and the wages for the individuals in transitional jobs. The budget should indicate what funds are already in place to support those costs and what additional funding is needed up to \$200,000 a year.

Q: Could funds from Joyce be used disproportionately to fund the control group if only the treatment group met the other funders' requirements?

Yes. The \$200,000 a year is not restricted -- the Foundation wants to make sure that the full program that covers both the treatment group and the control group is funded for the three years. The Foundation's contribution could support any part of the budget.

Q: Can we include financial incentives such as a bonus for 90 days of employment?

If you think that incentives are important, go ahead and propose them and we will review this as part of the overall proposal review.

Q: If we have funds from the President's Prisoner Re-entry Initiative can we still apply for Foundation funding?

Yes. Be sure to indicate in the budget that you plan to leverage these funds as part of this study.

Q: What if we have existing funding, but we have outcome requirements that would preclude the participants from getting the services Joyce requires?

Ultimately this will have to be up to the provider to navigate, whether or not the existing funds will meet the requirements of the grant. We do not expect the \$200,000 a year from the Foundation to fully fund all the requirements of the Initiative, so other funds will be needed.

Q: What if our proposed match funding comes from a contract that is renewed on an annual basis?

It is ideal to have your match committed for all three years up front but it is understandable that in some cases, your funding source renews on an annual basis. You should ask for a letter from the funder that indicates that your organization would at least be eligible for three years of funding.

Application and Timeline

Q: What is the timeline for proposal review and announcements?

Proposals are due by 5:00pm CST on March 17, 2006. Applicants will likely hear sometime in late May whether or not their program has been selected as a finalist. The Joyce Foundation Board of Directors will meet on July 21, 2006 to make final decisions and programs selected will be announced after that.

Q: Do you anticipate making only four grants in total in this initiative?

Yes.