



# Beyond Access: Advancing Racial Equity and Inclusion in Prison Education Programs

**Vera** INSTITUTE  
OF JUSTICE

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# Foreword

Shaping educational institutions to serve those most marginalized in our society is a critical element of racial and social justice. That is why this report's focus on overcoming inequities in postsecondary education in prison is such a shining example of the Vera Institute of Justice's (Vera's) Race, Equity, and Inclusion (REI) efforts.

At Vera, we hold dearly our antiracist and equity principles. For more than three years, Vera's REI department—preceded by a staff-led REI initiative—has been dedicated to supporting Vera staff in applying an intersectional, antiracist, anti-oppressive focus and approach to the work we do internally and externally. We name our focus and approach as addressing race *first* because of its outsized effects on workplaces and the criminal legal and immigration systems that we aim to transform. However, we do not limit our REI focus to race; we are also deeply dedicated to gender equity, queer liberation, disability justice, equity for people who have been system-impacted, and other forms of equity and justice.

This focus and dedication, and the action that results from them, are especially important at this critical juncture in the country's history. During the past decade, we've seen a surge of racial justice organizing, activating, advocating, and protesting, particularly in reaction to the police killings of Black people in the United States. In response to every major, Black-led movement for racial justice in the United States, white-led backlash has always been fierce. The current spate of lawmaking and book-banning aimed at whitewashing this country's racist history and present shows us again the force of this fierceness. As critical race theory, wokeness, and even diversity, equity, and inclusion have been vilified and attacked, the U.S. Supreme Court has jumped in to join these efforts by eliminating affirmative action in higher education and abortion rights, decisions whose far-reaching negative effects fall uniquely on Black, Indigenous, and other people of color.

Now, as much as ever, we need to counteract the racial and social miseducation that poisons so much of our mainstream media and public discourse, misguides our institutions, and gravely damages us all. And arguably, the most equitable place to start undoing miseducation of all sorts is behind carceral walls, where our society tragically sends so many people to be dehumanized and forgotten. In 1964, Malcolm X said, “Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.” We are so proud that our colleagues on Vera’s Unlocking Potential Initiative have worked diligently to ensure that more people in prison have their passport to an enriched, dignified future. This report is testament to those years of work, and we hope it inspires you to invest in bright futures for people who are in prison or otherwise impacted by the criminal legal system.

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# Executive Summary

The July 2023 return of Pell Grant eligibility for all people in prisons brings not only a monumental shift in opportunity but also a responsibility to ensure that everyone—regardless of race or ethnicity—gets access to that opportunity and the support to make use of it.<sup>1</sup> The complexity of addressing racial disparities is compounded when working at the intersection of two racially inequitable systems: postsecondary education and corrections.

Advancing racial equity requires work from actors at all levels of both systems, particularly from those who are responsible for administering these programs, such as prison education program (PEP) directors from postsecondary institutions and education and program directors from corrections agencies. This work starts with a shared understanding of equity and the root causes of racial disparities. (See “Introduction” on page 10 and “Overlapping Inequities” on page 14.)

To bridge the gap between promising practices for advancing equity in postsecondary education and current corrections education practices, the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) launched a multiyear, cross-state, collaborative project to explore racial inequities in both systems and strategies to address their overlap in postsecondary prison education.<sup>2</sup> This process resulted in three significant recommendations:

- **Examine and implement policies and practices with a racial equity lens and set equity goals for PEPs.**

To advance equitable access and outcomes, PEPs and corrections agencies must apply a racial equity lens to all aspects of their program design, implementation, and monitoring. Postsecondary education and corrections policies and practices can have unintended negative impacts on people of color. Even when neither institution intends to discriminate, these policies and practices can shape who has access to programs in ways that

**Advancing racial equity requires work from actors at all levels of both systems, particularly from those who are responsible for administering these programs.**

promote or discourage access according to race. PEPs and corrections agencies should design their programs with equitable access, completion, and outcomes as a goal. This includes considering racial equity in policies governing eligibility, recruitment, enrollment, pedagogy, student services and supports, and reentry planning.<sup>3</sup> PEPs and corrections partners should examine and reform existing and create future policies and practices to advance equity goals. (See “Learning communities assess equity and implement strategies to advance equity” on page 19.)

- **Collect, share, analyze, and use student data.** Data allows programs to analyze disparities and ensure they can measure and sustain outcomes. PEPs, corrections, and other partners should build data collection, analysis, and use into their program design and implementation from the earliest planning stages. However, it is important to do so with equity goals in mind, which requires developing a common understanding of what goal is to be achieved (equitable programs) and what data will be required to measure and sustain this outcome. (See “Data Working Groups ground strategies in data” on page 37.)
- **Center student voice.** Student feedback strengthens programs. Ensuring that students and prospective students are a part of the process of forming strategic plans, designing programs, and revising policies helps program leaders to develop responsive programs that meet the needs and interests of incarcerated students. (See “Student Voice Councils center student voice in PEPs” on page 45.)

## Key concepts used in this report

Below is a set of key concepts used throughout this document, which were also used for context-setting with project participants. These concepts serve as important reference points to navigate the report, and this glossary provides insight into how Vera interpreted them during the project. These concepts are dynamic: definitions and understanding of key terms and concepts may evolve and perspectives on them may vary.

**Equity** is when opportunities, benefits, and resources exist so that each person can thrive in their own identities, circumstances, and history, such that disparities are eliminated. Ultimately, equity requires that one's identities, circumstances, or history does not statistically or experientially predict one's outcomes in an institution, system, or structure.

**Diversity** is a quantitative measure of variety or differences among individuals or groups.<sup>4</sup> It includes all ways in which people differ, encompassing all the characteristics that make one individual or group different from another individual or group. A broad definition includes not only race, ethnicity, and gender but also age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance. It also involves differences of ideas, perspectives, lived experiences, and values.

**Racial equity** is a process of eliminating racial disparities and improving outcomes for everyone. It is the intentional and continual practice of changing policies, practices, processes, systems, and structures by prioritizing measurable change in the lives of people of color.<sup>5</sup> Racial equity is when racial identity no longer predicts, in a statistical sense, how one fares. "How one fares" can be defined not only in outcomes related to well-being such as in health, employment, postsecondary education, and contacts with the criminal legal system but also in intangible and internal feelings of self-

esteem, self-worth, and belonging. In a state of racial inequity, race and ethnicity statistically predict access to resources and services that enable people to thrive in their own identities, circumstances, and histories.<sup>6</sup>

**Racism** is racial prejudice plus social and institutional power.<sup>7</sup> It also refers to a system of advantage, disadvantage, privilege, and oppression sustained by race—a socially constructed hierarchy originally devised to justify racism and categorize humans based largely on observable physical features such as skin color and hair texture.

**White supremacy** is an ideology positing that white people and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions are superior to people of color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. It describes historical and contemporary institutions with practices that ensure that people who are considered white are afforded economic, political, social, and cultural benefits at the expense of people who are not considered white.<sup>8</sup>

Both at a collective and an individual level, white supremacy is ever-present in society's institutional and cultural assumptions that assign value, morality, goodness, humanity, and deservingness to the white group while casting people and communities of color as worthless (worth less), immoral, bad, inhuman, and undeserving.

**Inclusion** means authentically bringing marginalized people or groups into processes, activities, decisions, and policymaking in a way that shares and builds power. It is a qualitative measure of the quality of representation, such as full access, significant participation, belonging, and power sharing.

A **lens** is a conceptual set of questions, concerns, and issues people proactively center and repeatedly consider when they plan, develop, evaluate, or implement a policy, program, or decision. A lens is applied at all times, not temporarily or as part of a separate side task or project.



A **racial equity lens** is a continuous reflective practice and conceptual set of questions, concerns, and issues that proactively considers the lived experiences and perspectives of people of color when planning, developing, evaluating, or implementing a policy, program, or decision. Using a racial equity lens centers race at the forefront of the decision-making process and helps ensure the outcome does not produce unintended racially disparate consequences.

**Prison Education Programs (PEPs)** encompass various educational opportunities within correctional facilities beyond high school, including vocational, career, and technical education, and academic pathways leading to accredited credentials such as certificates, associate's degrees, or bachelor's degrees. Although PEP technically refers to programs approved by the U.S. Department of Education to offer Pell Grants to incarcerated people, this report's findings extend to all postsecondary education initiatives in prison. It's worth noting that the postsecondary institutions featured in this report were participants in the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative. (See "Introduction" on page 10.) For simplicity, Vera uses "PEP" to refer to all prison-based postsecondary education programs in this report.

# Introduction

Prison education programs (PEPs) hold promise for mitigating harms to marginalized communities and communities of color, who are overrepresented in the criminal legal system.<sup>9</sup> The many promising benefits of PEPs include reduced recidivism, taxpayer savings, safer prisons and communities, and generational effects that disrupt cycles of poverty and create cycles of pursuit of postsecondary education.<sup>10</sup> For students and communities to realize the full potential of postsecondary education, PEPs and their departments of correction (DOC) partners must design programs with a racial equity lens that intentionally support students across all racial identities and ensure that these students have reliable access to postsecondary education, representation in the student body, and resources to complete programs and be connected to career opportunities.<sup>11</sup>

Advancing equitable outcomes in postsecondary education (such as eliminating completion gaps and post-graduate pay disparities) is a challenge in every context. Despite improvements in overall completion rates in recent years, disproportionately low completion rates for Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students persist.<sup>12</sup> These institutional

performance gaps exist in the prison context as well. Although it is true that PEPs enroll higher proportions of students of color when compared to the postsecondary education institutions that operate them, this is simply a reflection of the overrepresentation of people of color in prison.<sup>13</sup> Among

Second Chance Pell institutions, white students are overrepresented by seven percentage points compared to the overall prison

## A note on language

Language usage around race, ethnicity, gender, and other dimensions of diversity is ever evolving. As per Vera's style guide, this report uses Latinx as a gender-inclusive term for people of Latin American descent, culture, or origin.

However, the authors acknowledge that many people of Latin American descent may prefer other terms, such as Latine. We respect this term's intentions to be gender inclusive and accessible to Spanish readers and speakers.

population. Conversely, Black and particularly Latinx students are underrepresented when compared to the overall prison population, by 8 and 15 percentage points, respectively.<sup>14</sup>

Institutions—both postsecondary and corrections—operate independently through their policies and practices to produce racially disparate outcomes. When postsecondary institutions operate inside prisons, the intersection of corrections and postsecondary institution policy and practice may compound inequities that exist in both. “Race neutral” policies—policies written with the assumption that all groups will share equal benefits—are based on a myth of equal access and do not effect change for people of color.<sup>15</sup> Research shows that “race conscious” policies—for example, policies created to improve the experiences of people of color—have the most impact on these communities and help dismantle structural barriers to equity.<sup>16</sup>

To gain a deeper understanding of equity issues across states, pilot interventions, and provide recommendations for strategies to advance racial equity in PEPs, Vera launched the Race, Equity, and Inclusion in Postsecondary Education in Prison Project (REI Project) in collaboration with PEPs and DOCs in four states, ultimately working with three: Michigan, Oklahoma, and Washington. This report draws on lessons learned during the project. The sections that follow provide context on education and corrections systems in the United States and their relationship to race equity, share promising practices explored or implemented by Vera’s PEP and DOC partners, and offer recommendations to implement these strategies in new and existing PEPs.

## **The history of Pell Grants in prison education**

In December 2020, Congress lifted the 26-year ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated students through the FAFSA Simplification Act, restoring access to need-based federal financial aid and making it possible for hundreds of thousands of people in state and federal prisons to pursue postsecondary education.<sup>17</sup>

From the time the United States first provided need-based federal financial aid in the 1970s in the form of Pell Grants and their predecessor, the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant, people in prison were eligible to receive it.<sup>18</sup> By 1982, more than 350 postsecondary education programs had been established in state and federal prisons, offering incarcerated students an opportunity to pay tuition and fees with Pell Grants.<sup>19</sup> After more than 30 years of access and with more than 700 programs in operation, the 1994 crime bill revoked this eligibility.<sup>20</sup> The impact of this change was swift and severe. By the end of the first academic year following the passage of the crime bill, half of postsecondary programs in prison had closed.<sup>21</sup> By the end of the decade, only eight would remain.<sup>22</sup> In the decades that followed, the U.S. prison population grew dramatically, fueled by policies that incentivized incarceration, resulting in the exponential increase in incarceration of young people of color.<sup>23</sup>

In the years that followed the ban, postsecondary institutions, advocates, and corrections education leaders who saw the value in these programs found innovative ways to continue or restart them. Philanthropic endeavors helped to create and support discrete programs.<sup>24</sup> State-level initiatives coordinated the delivery of limited postsecondary education, primarily career and technical education, within many state prison facilities.<sup>25</sup> People coming home from prison with certificates and degrees embarked on successful careers, underscoring the power of these programs.<sup>26</sup> And research showing reduced recidivism among participants garnered corrections leaders' support for these initiatives.<sup>27</sup>

As the momentum of these postsecondary education in prison programs grew, federal policymakers took note. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) launched the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative (SCP) in 2015, piloting the restoration of Pell Grant eligibility to incarcerated people who enrolled in one of 67 selected postsecondary institutions.<sup>28</sup> Over the next six years, under the direction of

three administrations, this initiative was expanded twice to ultimately reach 200 postsecondary institutions in 48 states; the Federal Bureau of Prisons; Washington, DC; and Puerto Rico.<sup>29</sup> During this same period, formerly incarcerated leaders, Vera, corrections officials, and many others launched a successful campaign to overturn the federal ban. In December 2020, the FAFSA Simplification Act was signed into law, and on July 1, 2023, the act made it possible once again for people in state and federal prisons to pay tuition for postsecondary education with Pell Grants.<sup>30</sup>

# Overlapping Inequities Exist in the Postsecondary Education and Criminal Legal Systems

Racism and white supremacy often manifest and are recognized by people through interpersonal interactions or observable individual behavior. Focusing only on the interpersonal can cause one to overlook the impacts of racism at an institutional level (the systems that govern society) and cultural level (ideas normalized because of these institutions).<sup>31</sup> Institutional policies and practices can fail to account for—and are often the source of—racial disparities, typically benefiting white people more than people of color.

White people and people of color experience the postsecondary education and criminal legal systems in the United States differently and disparately. The groups that fare worse across these two systems are often the same: people who are Black, Latinx, Indigenous, women, LGBTQ+, or low-income.<sup>32</sup> To address issues with equity in access, completions, and outcomes of PEPs, postsecondary institutions and corrections partners must pursue targeted strategies crafted to reduce disparities, especially racial disparities.

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## **RACIAL DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION CAN IMPACT PEPs**

The United States has a longstanding history of unequal access to education for people of color, particularly Black people.<sup>33</sup> The legacy of this history, coupled with the creation of a system of education that rewards advantages and experiences typically concentrated among white students and students from higher-income families, continues to promote unequal access to education. Even before students arrive on a college campus, white students and students

of color have had different and unequal experiences that may help or hinder admission.<sup>34</sup> Advantages that support being accepted into and having success in postsecondary education include having friends and family who understand how to apply, the means to pay, adequately resourced primary and secondary school systems, access to honors and college preparatory courses, higher-skilled and more experienced teachers, and standardized testing preparation and tutors.<sup>35</sup>

Students of color who do make it past admissions and enrollment are less likely to graduate than their white peers due to numerous challenges, including fewer resources, like tutoring, that address their needs and practices that disadvantage them, such as placement testing and developmental education.<sup>36</sup> They also face barriers related to affordability (postsecondary education keeps getting more expensive while the racial wealth gap continues to grow), hostility in the student experience based on identity, invisibility in curricula and pedagogy, social segregation on campuses, and the marketing of more lucrative education and career pathways for some identity groups over others.<sup>37</sup> Even those who graduate despite all these obstacles have poorer outcomes compared to their white peers. Black secondary and postsecondary graduates earn less than their white fellow graduates, and Black graduates holding associate's degrees earn less than white people who hold only a high school diploma.<sup>38</sup> Black and Latinx students have a higher likelihood of being underemployed post-graduation.<sup>39</sup>

Racial disparities also exist within PEPs. The majority of people enter prison without a high school degree or equivalent. Within this group, unequal access to high-quality secondary education in communities means that Indigenous, Black, and Latinx people are less likely to have that credential when entering prison.<sup>40</sup> These students would be academically ineligible to enroll in a PEP from day one, leading to racial disparities in PEP enrollment. (For further exploration of the impact of education policies on racial equity, see "Learning communities assess equity and implement strategies to advance equity" on page 19.)

## **RACIAL DISPARITIES IN THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM CAN IMPACT PEPS**

People’s experiences vary greatly by identity—particularly their racial identity—in the criminal legal system as well.<sup>41</sup> Black people and other people of color are more likely to be surveilled, stopped, questioned, and arrested by police regardless of their behavior, primarily due to institutional policies that encourage discrimination and racial bias in these interactions.<sup>42</sup> Judges are more likely to set bail, including higher bail amounts, for people of color, particularly Black defendants, which often results in unnecessary pretrial incarceration for those unable to pay.<sup>43</sup> Racial bias may also influence discretionary pretrial processes such as prosecutors’ decision to proceed with a case and may contribute to more severe sentence offerings during plea bargaining or after trial.<sup>44</sup> On average, people of color experience worse outcomes at nearly every stage of the criminal legal system, including arrest rates, types of charges, conviction rates, bail imposed, and sentence length and type. The cumulative result is the substantial overrepresentation of people of color, particularly Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people, in U.S. prisons.<sup>45</sup>

These external disparities can translate to unequal access to education and programs designed to prepare incarcerated people for life after release. Security classification—a prison facility’s level of security—correlates to factors such as sentence length and conviction type, and people serving long sentences tend to be held in higher-security prisons.<sup>46</sup> As a result, higher-security facilities typically hold higher percentages of people of color.<sup>47</sup> In these facilities, there are few to no people preparing for release and, therefore, few programs—including postsecondary programs—designed to help people prepare for reentry.<sup>48</sup>

Eligibility criteria contribute to disparities as well. DOC policy often uses earliest release date—informed by factors like sentence

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length—to prioritize people closest to release for postsecondary education. Those with longer and life sentences—disproportionately Black, Indigenous, and Latinx—may never become eligible with these types of barriers in place.<sup>49</sup> Even when able to enroll, students closer to release may be considered first over students with longer sentences for key classes required for graduation, leading to longer time to program completion for students with longer sentences.<sup>50</sup>

DOCs' use of disciplinary records as an eligibility criterion for postsecondary education programs may result in fewer people of color being eligible to apply. For example, in many states, people qualify for postsecondary education while incarcerated only if they can meet certain requirements, including a clean disciplinary record for as many as three years.<sup>51</sup> Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people disproportionately receive disciplinary write-ups for rule violations, including nonviolent behavior such as having an untucked shirt, having too many possessions in living areas, stepping into an out-of-bounds area, or being late to a job assignment.<sup>52</sup> A series of these low-level violations can lead to very serious consequences, including placement in solitary confinement—in which most DOCs restrict technology access or congregate activities like postsecondary education classes.<sup>53</sup> DOCs may administratively withdraw students from postsecondary education due to write-ups issued while attending or sanctions that lead to confinement in restricted housing.

# Vera's Race, Equity, and Inclusion in Postsecondary Education in Prison Project

For more than a decade, Vera has supported the equitable expansion of high-quality postsecondary education in prisons across the United States. Since 2015, Vera has provided technical assistance to 200 postsecondary institutions participating in the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative (SCP), additional colleges working to develop PEPs, and 52 corrections agencies to support SCP and Pell reinstatement.<sup>54</sup>

Vera launched the Race, Equity, and Inclusion in Postsecondary Education in Prison Project (REI Project) in 2020. In consultation with postsecondary education equity experts, Vera engaged SCP institutions, their DOC partners, and postsecondary education system offices over two years to collect and analyze data, assess policies and practices, and pilot strategies to mitigate inequities. The project sought to achieve the following:

- (1) assess racial equity in postsecondary education in prisons through an analysis of policies and practices in each state;
- (2) pilot interventions expected to advance equity in postsecondary education programs in prison and evaluate the process for implementing the interventions; and
- (3) provide recommendations to corrections administrators and their partner postsecondary institutions on how to advance racial equity in their postsecondary education programs.

Through the REI Project, Vera aimed to connect the knowledge and strategies used to advance equity in postsecondary education with corrections education practices. To achieve this, Vera engaged organizations and experts knowledgeable in effective equity strategies within postsecondary education on campus (specifically,

the Education Strategy Group and HCM Strategists) to adapt and apply them to postsecondary education in prison. Vera invited four states to participate and ultimately moved forward with three: Michigan, Oklahoma, and Washington.<sup>55</sup> In August 2022, the Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections discontinued its participation in the REI Project due to existing internal DEI efforts.<sup>56</sup> Within each remaining state, Vera selected two to four SCP institution partners, for a total of nine, to participate alongside their state DOC.<sup>57</sup>

Over the course of the project, Vera and its partners piloted three interventions: (1) establishing a learning community within and across the states to discuss challenges, promising practices, and implementation and sustainability strategies; (2) creating Data Working Groups within each state that focused on developing a data collection, analysis, and use infrastructure that used a racial equity lens; and (3) establishing Student Voice Councils, in which student experiences and perspectives were embedded in the project and in the future development of the postsecondary programs, including future efforts to advance equity and inclusion.

## **LEARNING COMMUNITIES ASSESS EQUITY AND IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES TO ADVANCE EQUITY**

Vera developed two self-assessment tools with its consultant partners to inventory essential policies and practices that advance equity in postsecondary education in prison. One tool helped Vera examine DOC policy and practice and the other was used to assess postsecondary institutions. Using two tools emphasized the entities' distinct roles in advancing equitable practices in their PEPs.<sup>58</sup> The tools consisted of five domains: data collection, analysis, and use; program values and culture; recruitment and admissions; student supports; and education and career pathways.<sup>59</sup> DOC and PEP leads completed the assessments with others in their institutions who contribute to PEP implementation.<sup>60</sup>

Once completed, Vera and consultants reviewed the tools and made recommendations on opportunities to eliminate inequitable policies and establish policies that advance equity. Vera and consultants then worked with PEPs and DOCs to first develop

individual institutional priorities and then come to a consensus on a set of state REI priorities for the PEPs represented in the project. These action steps were documented in work plans for each state that synthesized the DOC and postsecondary institutional priorities. Vera then established learning communities at two levels. The first included stakeholders within each state who met regularly to work collaboratively toward achieving agreed-upon goals. The second included stakeholders from all three states who met nine times across the life of the project. At these virtual learning meetings, Vera and other subject matter experts provided an opportunity for a deeper dialogue about common practice areas of interest identified using the assessment tools.<sup>61</sup>

The sections that follow highlight lessons from the assessments and the effective practices shared among the learning communities.

## **APPLY MISSION AND EQUITY GOALS TO PEPS**

Although the details of their agencies' overall mission statements varied, all three DOCs had among their objectives a stated goal to “empower individuals” or “promote success.”<sup>62</sup> Likewise, the postsecondary institutions involved in this project had varying missions, but in most cases described promoting student success through education.<sup>63</sup> This underlying mission alignment within and between institutions of postsecondary education and DOCs provided an opportunity for each type of institution to meet and support each other's missions and goals while advancing their own.

Most of the postsecondary institutions had diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives underway on their main campuses. However, none had an explicit goal to advance equity for incarcerated students in their program. One DOC noted a DEI initiative; however, it was focused on staff rather than the incarcerated population.<sup>64</sup> When racial equity is not explicitly

**Through this project, we learned we must be more intentional about our programs. That offering postsecondary opportunities alone is not enough, that we need to be intentional about ensuring equitable access, enrollments, persistence, and outcomes—and to hold ourselves accountable to that through policies and public reports.**

Kyle Kaminski,  
OS Administrator,  
Michigan Department of Corrections

brought into operations and decision-making, institutions and systems are more likely to unintentionally perpetuate racial inequities.<sup>65</sup> As part of the workplan, PEP and DOC partners in each state developed a vision statement for an equitable system of postsecondary education in prison.

**Promising practices.** Tulsa Community College in Oklahoma noted its involvement in the University of Southern California Center for Urban Education’s Equity Scorecard initiative. This ongoing effort offered an opportunity to include the unique considerations of PEP students into these cross-departmental conversations as well as to integrate campuswide goals and initiatives into PEPs. Similarly, the Oklahoma DOC saw an opportunity to integrate efforts from this project into its existing initiatives by broadening the scope of its DEI committee to include the incarcerated population and the programs they can access. Expanding on existing efforts can be an inroad for DOCs and PEPs elsewhere to consider. In Washington State, Tacoma Community College spent two years developing a mission and goals that align with institutional DEI goals. It plans to develop an addendum to this mission and goals that focuses directly on the incarcerated student population.

### **Recommendations:**

- Develop or update program, institutional, and agency missions to articulate a goal for equity—specifically regarding marginalized groups—such as to define equity and explicitly name advancing equity as a measure of success.
- Integrate PEP equity advancement efforts into existing REI/DEI institutional or agency initiatives.

## **HIRING, TRAINING, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SHOULD SUPPORT EQUITY**

Postsecondary faculty and staff too often lack people of color, while student bodies grow increasingly representative of communities of color.<sup>66</sup> The racial disparities between faculty and students on non-PEP campuses are even more stark in PEPs due to the higher proportion of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students in prison

programs compared to the non-PEP campuses.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, most prisons are located in majority white, rural areas across the country, often the same communities where corrections staff reside.<sup>68</sup> Training and professional development that helps faculty, PEP administrators, and corrections education staff understand and act to counter implicit bias, racism, and white supremacy, and—for faculty—implement inclusive pedagogy, can help mitigate this challenge and advance student success goals.<sup>69</sup>

Hiring practices, training, and professional development are instrumental for agencies and institutions to establish a culture that supports equitable student success. All postsecondary institutions and DOCs in this project required faculty and staff implementing PEPs to undergo training. Most of these trainings were designed to ensure the programs and their staff adhered to prison institutional practices and PEP administrative requirements. In only a few cases did PEPs indicate they had developed training programs for their faculty that have components specific to working with incarcerated people from diverse backgrounds. All participants indicated a desire to learn more about how to integrate racial equity concepts into existing training and professional development components to better serve incarcerated students.

**Promising practices.** In Michigan, Calvin University used concepts learned from the project to bolster its faculty training curriculum, and the DOC committed to prioritize hiring candidates who are system-impacted, demographically reflect the population, and/or align with DOC values. Tacoma Community College in Washington uses members of its Student Voice Councils to sit in on faculty interviews. (See “Student Voice Councils center student voice in PEPs” on page 45.) Students shared during the project that they thought it was important to select faculty who would be a good fit for teaching in a prison environment and suggested that they were best positioned to weigh in on a candidate’s fitness for the job.

**Hiring practices, training, and professional development are instrumental for agencies and institutions to establish a culture that supports equitable student success.**

## Recommendations:

- Develop or update hiring processes to ensure the hiring of underrepresented faculty and staff—particularly those who reflect the identities of incarcerated students—whose views align with the program, institution, or agency’s mission and equity goals.
- Create training and professional development programs that utilize an inclusive pedagogy with strategies to counter implicit bias, racism, and white supremacy and that also do not rely exclusively on training designed to meet the minimum standards of complying with laws, regulations, or agency policy.
- Ensure students, staff, and faculty are included in creating curriculum, policy, and training/professional development.

## LEARN FROM RELATED RESEARCH AND EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

At present, there are few resources available to PEP and DOC leaders implementing PEPs that connect evidence-based practices in corrections, “high-impact” practices in postsecondary education, and promising strategies to advance equity in postsecondary education access, completion, and outcomes.<sup>70</sup> To bridge the gaps between the research and implementation of PEPs, Vera, consultants, and the state teams approached these issues from an exploratory standpoint. Vera connected state teams with resources to enhance their practices in a wide range of additional areas. This assistance came in the form of facilitated discussion, research support, planning, and implementation strategies. Highlighted below are equity-advancing practices that learning communities discussed.

### RECRUITMENT

There are aspects of recruitment, such as how PEPs and DOCs recruit and who recruits new students, which can lead to inequitable access and enrollments in racially segregated environments like prisons. Recruiting a representatively diverse student body from

among the social networks in a prison is challenging. In prisons, information tends to travel by word of mouth. Social networks in prison often fall along racial and ethnic lines.<sup>71</sup> Information may travel well within a social group defined by race but not as well or not at all across groups. At the same time, white people and people from higher-income backgrounds are more likely to have family members and friends who have had positive experiences in education and may be more likely to enroll.<sup>72</sup> If prospective students are not seeing people from their racial group attending classes, they may assume it is not an inclusive or welcoming environment for them. These factors can lead to the appearance of interest concentrated within one or a few racial groups and little enrollment interest from others. Program recruitment strategies not attuned to these differences in experience and social networks among students may not connect with students from all backgrounds.<sup>73</sup>

**Promising practices.** In Michigan, Jackson College and the DOC worked together to devise a way to get recruitment messages out to a broader audience via facility information kiosks and tablets. Although the PEP's audience was limited to current students, the DOC's audience included all people at the prison. In Oklahoma, the DOC worked closely with its systemwide tablet provider to learn how to use the tablets more effectively as an education tool, including for recruitment. During the project, one of the PEPs piloted the distribution of a flyer for its program via the tablets, which was celebrated by Student Voice Council members. (See "Student Voice Councils center student voice in PEPs" on page 45.) In Washington, Student Voice Council members play the role of credible messengers, speaking at orientation classes for people coming into the prison system and high school diploma/high school equivalency (HSD/HSE) classes and participating in recruitment events. These students noted how their peers were inspired to enroll in PEPs when seeing SVC members talk about their own successes and transformative experiences.

### **Recommendations:**

- Use a variety of recruiting tools including technology, posters, flyers, information sessions, meetings with facility staff, and word of mouth to reach students.



- Consider using current and graduated students, including members of Student Voice Councils, as credible messengers.
- Disseminate program marketing that clearly communicates the eligibility guidelines, the enrollment process, and how to connect with advisors or navigators so students can make informed decisions. (See “Student support services” on page 27.)

## PAYING FOR SCHOOL

Although Pell Grant restoration reestablishes a crucial source of federal financial aid, people in prison face a variety of other financial hurdles to accessing PEPs. Living in prison comes with costs borne by incarcerated people and their families. Incarcerated people often need to purchase supplemental food and clothing and pay for phone calls home, fees for room and board in prison, medical co-pays, or restitution or other court-imposed fines.<sup>74</sup> They may also wish to send money home to loved ones while incarcerated. Although wages are meager, forgoing them can be impossible, either due to financial need or forced labor.<sup>75</sup> This has two implications for equitable enrollment in PEPs. First, when PEPs are offered only during hours that conflict with their job assignments, some potential students will make the difficult choice to work instead. Second, even with need-based financial aid available, there are costs, such as the living expenses described above, that cannot be paid for with a Pell Grant in prison even though many of these expenses would be considered in financial aid award packages for non-incarcerated students.<sup>76</sup>

**Although Pell Grant restoration reestablishes a crucial source of federal financial aid, people in prison face a variety of other financial hurdles to accessing PEPs.**

Among incarcerated people who earn any wages for their work, the average wage is between \$0.13 and \$1.30 per hour.<sup>77</sup> With such low wages, even a \$7 transcript fee may become a substantial barrier to enrollment. An application fee or any amount of previous student loan debt could be insurmountable.<sup>78</sup> Most incarcerated student loan borrowers are in default, and existing avenues for addressing loan defaults are unaffordable and out of reach.<sup>79</sup> Even when students are eligible for need-based aid, costs can still be a barrier. Federal financial aid policy requires that postsecondary

institutions return grants awarded to students when they withdraw from courses too early in the term—even when the withdrawal is because of an unexpected transfer to another prison.<sup>80</sup> Typical postsecondary institution practice is to pass this cost to the student, charging them the tuition that the grant would have otherwise covered. However, such a practice would likely saddle an incarcerated student with overwhelming debt that could not only have an impact on their ever returning to postsecondary education but also could impact their ability to have a successful reentry experience post-release.

In addition to their own reduced means, most people in prison come from low-income communities and families.<sup>81</sup> Research indicates that Black communities face high rates of incarceration among both friends and family.<sup>82</sup> People who have been diagnosed with mental illness, have experienced adverse childhood experiences, and men tend to have less supportive social networks, and men, in particular, have less emotional and instrumental support both during incarceration and after release.<sup>83</sup> This suggests that when there are costs to enrolling in a PEP, most incarcerated people will face challenges in drawing on their nonincarcerated support networks for help in paying these costs. The intergenerational and community impact of incarceration can also make it difficult to gather crucial documents to complete the FAFSA, making it impossible to apply for a Pell Grant.<sup>84</sup>

**Promising practices.** In Michigan, DOC administrators are looking at how they can ensure that incarcerated people do not have to choose between education and work by offering stipends and are considering how they might incentivize higher levels of educational achievement with a sliding-scale stipend system. To overcome the documentation burden on students or to fill other funding gaps, several participating PEPs in all three states used funding streams other than Pell Grants, including state- and private-funded programs in Washington and Michigan and tribal grants and institutional scholarships at PEPs in Oklahoma.

## Recommendations:

- DOCs can eliminate the conflict between work and school and incentivize education for people who are currently incarcerated by offering an education stipend to those participating in education programs.<sup>85</sup>
- DOCs and PEPs can revisit facility schedules and reduce conflict between work and school hours by offering courses at night or at other times that do not overlap with prison jobs or by offering jobs at different hours to people enrolled in the PEP.
- PEPs should examine the funding available to support students in other locations of their institution and then determine how to make these opportunities accessible to incarcerated students.
- PEPs should plan in-prison office hours or financial aid workshops to address challenges in paying for school. Specifically, PEPs can expect and should prepare to assist students with financial aid barriers such as forgotten Social Security numbers, pre-incarceration student loans in default, or inability to find or receive tax records, even for non-filers.

## STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

PEP faculty and staff orient new students to postsecondary education and help them select courses, programs, and majors. How PEPs approach student services can shape enrolled students' completion rates and academic success. Students complete credentials more consistently and quickly when they enroll full-time and when they are interested in the topics they are studying.<sup>86</sup> To ensure students' engagement—and thus, their chance of academic success—PEPs can mix required distribution courses with higher-level courses in subjects in which the student is most interested. They could also utilize hands-on learning experiences such as internships or career exploration opportunities in which students meet with people in their fields of interest and discuss the work they do. These promising practices bring students' credential goals in reach sooner, increasing their motivation to continue and complete postsecondary education.<sup>87</sup>

Identifying student needs is vital to adequately support students. Older models that rely on tests meant to assess a student's academic preparedness produce unreliable results and tend to underestimate the academic skills of people of color.<sup>88</sup> In newer models, assessments still play a role, but not as high-stakes placement tests. The multiple measures assessment approach considers high school transcripts, a variety of assessments, and evaluations of student motivation.<sup>89</sup> Effective and equitable practices in postsecondary education such as pre-college or summer bridge programs, corequisite rather than prerequisite courses, embedded tutoring, cohort models in which a group moves through a course or series of courses together, and intensive and frequent advising all can produce more positive outcomes for students and can be applied to PEPs.<sup>90</sup> These strategies are more accurate than assessment testing in identifying students' needs and academic preparedness and produce more equitable placements for students.<sup>91</sup>

Academic and career advising support students across their academic paths and are integral to fulfilling the teaching and learning mission of postsecondary education. Postsecondary institutions seeking to become PEPs under the regulations governing Pell reinstatement must provide these services.<sup>92</sup> Academic advising helps students to engage with the learning process, be members of the learning community, think critically about their role as students, and implement their learning as citizens of the world.<sup>93</sup> Advising can also help PEP staff identify student needs and connect them with vital resources. Although career advising can often be a separate function in an academic institution, it is similarly meant to help students think more deeply about their academic options and connect their learning with their career interests and pathway.<sup>94</sup>

**Promising practices.** Students participating in this project almost universally noted the desire for more tutoring from faculty, PEP staff, or peers. In the absence of available faculty or staff, many students indicated that informal peer networks developed in which students supported one another with more challenging assignments or

**Academic advising helps students to engage with the learning process, be members of the learning community, think critically about their role as students, and implement their learning as citizens of the world.**

subjects. However, finding the time and space to do so was often a significant barrier. Administrators should formalize tutoring structures and compensate peer tutors to help ensure quality and sustainability and recognize student leaders for their work to support student success. Student Voice Council participants and education administrators in Michigan worked together during this project to identify spaces and times to ensure these activities can take place. Mott Community College recently piloted paid tutoring roles in the facility with support from the DOC.

PEPs might also consider credentialing tutors. In Washington, one college partner piloted credentialing peer tutors through the College Reading and Learning Association.<sup>95</sup> This is one way to recognize the skills of peer tutors while simultaneously setting and raising the standards for tutoring staff in general. Similarly, students also noted how finding quiet spaces to study on their own was often a challenge. To support studying and tutoring, some states have created housing units where students live together, something that Michigan has piloted with some success.

For PEPs participating in this project, student support came in various forms ranging from staff tasked with multiple roles that included advising to designated academic advising faculty. Students participating in the project often noted the value of these staff while simultaneously recognizing their high workloads. For example, in Washington, facility and campus education navigators funded through a partnership between the DOC and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges provide numerous services to students including career and academic advising or connections to these services both prerelease in prison and post-release on campus. In Oklahoma, Tulsa Community College and Connors State College placed staff at each facility who provide similar services. The PEPs there are able to supplement staff capacity with student clerks who help guide their peers through the enrollment and financial aid process and act as liaisons between the PEP and the student body. In Michigan, Calvin University uses student support specialists, funding by federal TRIO programs, and regular access to faculty advising. (See “Leveraging Federal TRIO Programs” on page 31.) Likewise, Jackson College uses success navigators. The Michigan

**Students participating in this project almost universally noted the desire for more tutoring from faculty, PEP staff, or peers.**

DOC is working to address challenges with limited staff capacity by hiring additional support staff.

### **Recommendations:**

- Avoid standardized placement tests that cause racially disparate barriers to entry. Instead, use other mechanisms to identify and support students with needs, such as pre-college courses, corequisite support courses, embedded tutoring programs, and high-touch advising.
- Eliminate developmental and prerequisite courses that create barriers to students progressing in their programs in favor of targeted tutoring based on need, intensive advising, and corequisites.
- Use multiple measures to place students into appropriate courses and supports, such as high school or postsecondary education transcripts, highest level of coursework completed in a subject area and corresponding course grade, attitude surveys, vocational or career aptitude interest inventories, specialized certificates or licenses, education and employment histories, military training and experience, interviews, and holistic scoring processes, all of which account for a range of experiences and metrics.
- Create a continuum of student services that span pre-enrollment through reentry, including:
  - Implementing advising models that build momentum for students by pairing required courses with areas of interest, accumulate credits quickly to keep the credential in reach, and help students identify and pursue career interests.
  - Hiring dedicated navigators and advisors and paying student clerks who provide services otherwise offered by PEP staff, for example through the Federal Work-Study Program.<sup>96</sup>
  - Providing tutors who can address specific learning needs and implementing peer tutoring models (and

ensuring that these positions are formalized and compensated), as well as credentialing all tutors to raise standards and help recognize their skills.

- Ensuring adequate quiet study spaces are available on a consistent, predictable schedule.

## Leveraging Federal TRIO Programs

To supplement support offered by prison education programs, several states leverage federal TRIO programs to provide supplemental services to students who are incarcerated. TRIO programs are uniquely designed to support students from underserved communities, focusing on students with low incomes, first-generation students, and students with disabilities.<sup>97</sup> These include

- Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC), which specialize in recruiting and enrolling students, including helping them prepare for postsecondary education and navigate financial aid procedures. Although sometimes an EOC is hosted within a particular college, EOCs are mandated to recruit and help enroll students into all postsecondary institutions, which can be particularly beneficial in prison systems where multiple colleges offer a PEP.<sup>98</sup>
- Student Support Services (SSS) programs, which offer tutoring, academic advising, and financial aid guidance to help motivate and support students toward completion. SSS programs are institution-specific, meaning that, unlike an EOC, they are limited to serving only the students within their host postsecondary institution.<sup>99</sup>

## DIGITAL EQUITY

Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people are less likely than their white peers to have had consistent access to high-speed internet at primary and secondary school and at home prior to incarceration.<sup>100</sup> Due to racial disparities in sentence length, incarcerated people of color are more likely to have been in prison for so long that

technological advances have passed them by.<sup>101</sup> Even those with shorter sentences can be affected by the disconnection of incarceration.<sup>102</sup> People in prison rarely have access to the kinds of technology available in the community, like smartphones, tablets, and personal computers. When they do have these devices, the tools and materials they can access through them are limited by firewalls and security protocols and are often outdated.<sup>103</sup> Students in PEPs regularly write assignments by hand, sometimes in multiple copies so they can retain a record.<sup>104</sup> Employers expect college graduates to have the skills to operate common workplace technology, but incarcerated students face substantial difficulty in gaining these skills.<sup>105</sup>

Postsecondary institutions in the community require students to engage with various forms of technology from basic word processing, spreadsheets, and email to more complex statistical software, math and engineering modeling applications, coding applications, and industry-relevant tools and programs. Bachelor's degrees typically require some level of academic research experience to graduate. PEPs have experimented with different methods for offering relevant academic technology in prison. This includes access to academic journal databases such as JSTOR and EBSCOhost, which not only allow students to use these materials but also offer them the opportunity to develop and exercise the skills to find relevant literature within these databases.<sup>106</sup>

**Promising practices.** Models for technology access are emerging in various states, with a growing momentum to provide broader access.<sup>107</sup> In Washington, for example, PEPs issue each incarcerated student a laptop that operates on an internal server. Students get access to a learning management system (LMS) operated by PEP instructors, supplemental instruction, support materials, and word processing software. In Oklahoma, students have systemwide access to tablet technology, but it has not yet been deployed to support student learning. During the project, PEPs worked with the tablet provider to learn how to utilize the LMS for supplementing instruction. In Michigan, the DOC has committed to expanding

**Employers expect college graduates to have the skills to operate common workplace technology, but incarcerated students face substantial difficulty in gaining these skills.**



educational technology, piloting small-scale deployment and consulting with other DOC information technology teams to learn tactics for managing security concerns.

### **Recommendations:**

- Provide access to technology as an educational support tool and to ensure students are equipped to navigate the technology they will face in the community upon reentry.
- Leverage the growing availability of online and offline academic journal databases, such as JSTOR and EBSCOhost, through digital libraries.
- Build towards broader access by test-piloting technology deployments to ensure security and build buy-in with administrators or, when necessary, building systems that can operate on internal servers.

### **CREDENTIAL PATHWAYS**

Education resources in prisons are scarce. DOCs often prioritize limited space for other mandatory programming, such as Adult Basic Education, HSD/HSE programs, or programs required for parole.<sup>108</sup> Therefore, system actors must think strategically about which programs they offer to incarcerated people and make the best use of their limited resources by prioritizing programs that produce a return on investment for students in terms of wages and/or advancement in a desired career, that students are most interested in, and that help students avoid spending limited Pell Grant funding on courses they do not need. Credentials that “stack” onto one another to earn higher-level credentials leading to in-demand living-wage careers are important to prioritize when space and resources are at a premium.<sup>109</sup> In addition to career-technical programs, bachelor’s degrees provide training in perpetually in-demand transferrable skills that lead to viable career pathways.<sup>110</sup> Associate’s degrees for transfer have a place in a credential and career path as well. Although these degrees do not always equate to livable-wage

**System actors must think strategically about which programs they offer . . . prioritizing programs that produce a return on investment for students.**

careers on their own, they hold value when they enable students to transfer efficiently and earn a bachelor's degree, preferably as part of a designed direct transfer or "2+2" model—a model in which the receiving four-year institution guarantees junior-level matriculation to students who achieve specific two-year credentials.<sup>111</sup>

Program administrators will likely encounter students with a variety of accumulated credits from past education experience. It is important that institutions operating PEPs within the same jurisdiction commit to working with one another to ensure students who end up in programs other than where they started can continue seamlessly so that previous efforts and resources are not wasted. Under the regulations governing Pell reinstatement, PEPs must also provide transferability.<sup>112</sup> Program administrators should also find ways to help students receive credit for skills learned through other experiences, such as work, professional or military training, language acquisition other than English, or courses taken during incarceration. Prior learning assessments or credit for prior learning may present good opportunities to move students closer to completion by awarding credit for college-level knowledge a student gained outside of the postsecondary classroom and may include standardized exams (such as the College-Level Examination Program, or CLEP) or institutional reviews.<sup>113</sup>

**Promising practices.** In Michigan, the DOC has implemented a guided pathways approach—an equity-focused framework that creates clear paths for students and removes systemic obstacles to their success—in its Vocational Village program, which partners closely with local industry to ensure the programs offered align with student need.<sup>114</sup> The DOC also partnered with Siena Heights University, which specializes in degree completion and is developing a bachelor's degree pathway for students with accumulated credits or associate's degrees. Mott Community College (MCC) partnered with Ferris State University to offer a "3+1" program in business administration where MCC provides the first three years of instruction that leads to a bachelor's degree. In Oklahoma, Tulsa Community College and Langston University started strengthening their partnership during this project to create a more robust 2+2 pathway. In Washington,

one-year certificate programs in fields like automotive technology, HVAC, welding, and various business certificates from Walla Walla Community College and Tacoma Community College can pair with additional instruction to lead to two-year Associate of Applied Science degrees. Walla Walla Community College also offers a direct transfer associate's degree (DTA) in human and social services to help students continue to a bachelor's degree program while incarcerated or on release. Tacoma Community College also offers a DTA program in partnership with Freedom Education Project Puget Sound at the Washington Corrections Center for Women that transfers directly into a bachelor's in liberal studies from the University of Puget Sound.

### **Recommendations:**

- Offer streamlined pathways to industry-recognized, in-demand, living-wage-yielding credentials for students.
- When PEPs offer general and transfer associate's degree pathways, ensure they efficiently transfer to a bachelor's degree program.
- Create memorandums of understanding among programs within the state to allow transfer of credits among PEP programs and to other programs in the community.
- Create options for students with accumulated credits and prior learning experiences to complete a credential, such as CLEP exams and other prior learning assessments and reviews.

### **REENTRY SUPPORTS**

Students leaving prison—particularly those who are Black, Latinx, or Indigenous—often return to frayed social networks, lack of opportunity, and an enormous array of state and federal laws and community supervision rules that regulate the lives of people with conviction histories.<sup>115</sup> These are extraordinarily difficult circumstances and require extra support for students reentering, with specific supports needed by those who are seeking to complete a credential not completed during incarceration. These supports may include connecting students to educational

institutions near their communities and to support staff who are on the outside. Students may need assistance accessing transcripts, transferring to a new institution, and updating financial aid records as well as connections to on-campus support services that can help with navigating the postsecondary educational experience. The ability for students who do not complete a degree prior to release to continue at the same institution after release is also a requirement of PEP regulations.<sup>116</sup>

For students who leave prison with credentials, PEPs and corrections partners must ensure they can navigate the job market and get hired. Allowing students to connect with potential employers before release can help better prepare them for these conversations post-release, including practicing articulating how their newly acquired skills apply in the real world. Emerging models that intentionally support postsecondary education and the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated people hold great promise.<sup>117</sup>

**Promising practices.** In Washington, a partnership between the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and the Washington DOC provides education navigators both within the prison facilities and on campus for students at each partner PEP, to help create a strong connection between facilities students are leaving and campuses to which they are returning. Employment readiness and employer connections were a notable strength in all three states participating in the project. However, these robust supports tended to focus almost exclusively on career and technical education programs run by the corrections agencies or other state agencies and not the academic programs run by PEPs.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Develop support systems that span the student experience, including targeted on-campus services for those continuing education post-release.

**Students leaving prison—particularly those who are Black, Latinx, or Indigenous—often return to frayed social networks, lack of opportunity, and an enormous array of state and federal laws and community supervision rules that regulate the lives of people with conviction histories.**

- Connect students to employment opportunities prior to release and prepare them to have conversations about their educational and work experiences that translate to workforce needs.

## **DATA WORKING GROUPS GROUND STRATEGIES IN DATA**

In PEPs, the sources of disparities are likely to be complex, subtle, and often challenging to identify on an individual level, which makes the use of data critical.<sup>118</sup> To identify sources of disparities and assess the effect of planned interventions, PEPs and DOCs need to collect, analyze, and collaboratively use data.<sup>119</sup> PEPs and DOCs can use this information to inform changes to policy and practice and support the engagement of underrepresented groups in PEPs.

PEPs and DOCs collect and store data about students and people in the prison or prison system, respectively. However, DOCs and PEPs that participated in Vera’s REI Project store data in ways that support the implementation of programming but not necessarily the tracking of outcomes. From the assessment tool (See “Learning communities assess equity and implement strategies to advance equity” on page 19), Vera identified three common challenges to using data faced by participating PEPs and DOCs:

- data exists, but not in a way that is conducive to program assessment or evaluation;
- partners in PEPs and DOCs face capacity constraints; and
- collected data is not used for assessment or evaluation of race, equity, and inclusion goals.

To promote data collection, sharing, and collaborative use to support and inform race, equity, and inclusion interventions, Vera, PEPs, and DOCs piloted Data Working Groups (DWGs) in all three states.

**To identify sources of disparities and assess the effect of planned interventions, PEPs and DOCs need to collect, analyze, and collaboratively use data.**

Through the DWGs, Vera found that participating DOCs struggled to use their data systems to identify people eligible for PEPs based on academic qualifications, in-facility behavioral history, and correctional programming requirements because DOCs did not set up data systems with this purpose in mind. As a result, a corrections education professional might determine the pool of eligible people through a manual review of individual files or by recommending only people who express interest in the program. These strategies limit the pool of prospective students to those already interested in education or for whom the DOC staff member believes the program would be a good fit. This type of passive recruitment of prospective students can have racial equity implications by excluding people in prison who do not believe postsecondary education is for them, who do not learn about opportunities through social networks, or who have not managed to make connections with DOC staff.

Similarly, PEP administrators work with data systems designed with other uses in mind. For example, postsecondary institutions in each of the three states do not always store incarcerated students' records in a way that allows for data analysis of students in prison, separate from those who are not in prison.<sup>120</sup> Without the ability to review student metrics at the prison locations, PEP administrators may miss opportunities to identify and respond to student needs. With PEP classrooms typically filled with higher proportions of students of color than those on campus, this missing functionality could hinder student success in a way that impacts a concentrated group of students of color.

Challenges with data systems reflect an overall lack of capacity within DOCs and PEPs to explore and address questions of equity. PEPs and DOCs face two types of capacity constraints: resource constraints and knowledge constraints. Resource constraints include the limited availability of funding and personnel for data analysis and use.<sup>121</sup> Knowledge constraints include difficulty framing questions about racial equity in PEPs as research questions that staff can answer with available data.<sup>122</sup> The dual impact of these

**Without the ability to review student metrics at the prison locations, PEP administrators may miss opportunities to identify and respond to student needs.**

constraints puts PEPs and DOCs at a significant disadvantage in understanding and responding to inequities in their PEPs.

All PEPs and DOCs that participated in this project collect some information and often report on the race and ethnicity of students and people who are incarcerated generally. However, PEPs often use this data primarily for program administration and compliance reporting rather than to assess racial equity within programs, conduct strategic planning, support policy development, or evaluate progress toward race, equity, and inclusion goals. As discussed, existing data system structures and PEP and correctional education capacity constraints present challenges to the proactive use of data to inform strategic planning and policy development to promote racial equity.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO PROMOTE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RACE, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION GOALS USING DATA**

Vera piloted six practices with participants in this project to explore the importance of data in measuring equity and quality, identify additional capacity within and across both education and correctional institutions, and embed the routine use of data into strategic planning and accountability for race, equity, and inclusion goals.

### **DEVELOP AN ONGOING FORUM FOR COLLABORATION WITHIN AND ACROSS INSTITUTIONS THAT IDENTIFIES ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

This project piloted statewide DWGs as a strategy to navigate data collection, sharing, and collaborative use to assess and promote accountability for racial equity goals. These groups functioned as open forums to share knowledge and available resources, identify and problem solve challenges, collaborate on defining racial equity goals, and gain a collective understanding of data-sharing processes with partner institutions. Establishing this forum at the state level supports efficient collaboration with correctional education and other statewide actors, including PEP partners, state higher education offices, and workforce and labor boards.

The DWGs drafted common objectives for themselves that expressed the goal and intended outcomes of the groups' efforts, as well as an initial timeline to achieve those goals. (See "Example goal and intended outcomes for a state Data Working Group" in Appendix B on page 67.) DWGs can use this as a living document and update it as goals, outcomes, and processes develop and become more complex over time.

DWGs should include a variety of stakeholders.<sup>123</sup> Identifying needed roles and people in the DWG may be an iterative process. Who is needed at the table may shift as the goals and outcomes of the DWG develop, and this may change over the life of the group. Program leads at each institution may need support in identifying which roles from within the institution they need in group meetings and who currently occupies those roles. Some guidance on essential roles to include and how to identify them within each institution is below.

- Program leads: Who is responsible and accountable for the overall administration of the PEP at your institution? Who is responsible for daily implementation of processes and procedures?
- Decision-makers: Who at your institution is making decisions that affect the PEP? Whose choices should be informed by evidence?
- Data holders: Who holds and maintains data about students? If you wanted to know a particular fact about the student body or about student success, who would you ask?

## **USE DATA FOR ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY WITH PURPOSE AND INTENTION**

In launching the DWGs, Vera first facilitated consensus among participants on race equity goals that DOCs and PEPs would like to attain. Next, Vera worked with participants to develop questions related to those goals that can be answered with data. Vera and its partners in this project pursued a four-step process to determine what PEPs and DOCs sought to learn about race, equity, and inclusion in postsecondary education in prisons in their program or state.



<p><b>1.</b> Involve important stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who has the power to effect change? Who is directly and inequitably impacted and whose voices need to be amplified?</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.</b> Agree on the program’s racial equity goals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do stakeholders want to achieve in the near-, mid- and long-term? What does success look like and for whom?</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.</b> Plan a strategy to achieve the goals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What inequities exist? What are the sources of those inequities? How can we address the causes of the inequities?</li> </ul>
<p><b>4.</b> Identify how to measure progress toward goals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would important stakeholders, including students and alumni, define progress? How do stakeholders know if programs have made progress on specified goals?</li> </ul>

**MAINTAIN A RACIAL EQUITY LENS THROUGHOUT ALL ACTIVITIES**

The DWGs practiced centering racial equity considerations in all data collection, sharing, and collaborative use by applying a racial equity lens. Participants consistently applied this lens throughout the activities in this project. This offered a measure of accountability and advanced the sustainability of the work done during this pilot. (See “Key concepts used in this report” on page 7.) Vera supported the DWGs by developing the following questions through which to apply a racial equity lens in data collection, sharing, and collaborative use:

- Whose voices and perspectives are centered, incorporated, or excluded in defining and prioritizing important equity questions, including how race and ethnicity are measured and categorized?
- What data sources are we using? How do those data sources reflect and reinforce existing power relationships? What alternate sources of data could we use or create ourselves?
- What is our comparison group for data analysis? How does shifting the comparison group change our conclusions?

- Which stages of the student life cycle are we assessing for racial equity: recruitment, enrollment, choice of programming, persistence or withdrawal, completions, or post-completion outcomes?

### **COLLABORATIVELY DEVELOP QUESTIONS AND DATA PLANS TO MEET EQUITY GOALS**

The PEPs and DOCs participating in each DWG developed questions and data plans collaboratively, constructing a single plan per state. Collaborative plans are more efficient for statewide actors such as DOCs and state higher education offices because they consolidate data requests that multiple stakeholders would otherwise submit separately. Collaboratively developed equity questions and data plans also build the capacity within each institution to understand processes for sharing data across all participating institutions. Finally, collaborating on equity questions supports the development of a common purpose across institutions and gives those who have well-developed racial equity goals an opportunity to provide leadership within the state. When missions and interests differ, DWGs can add additional and independent questions to a racial equity data plan.

**One PEP administrator noted how the project “helped them to realize how important a racial equity lens is to ensure they are not inadvertently harming students of color” and that “not thinking about race” isn’t the answer to stop racial disparities from occurring.**

Although the specifics of the question will vary, a question DWGs can answer with data should have several key features.

Specific, clear, focused, narrow in scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider who, what, when, where</li> <li>• If the question feels too narrow, it is probably not</li> <li>• If you want to know more, develop additional questions</li> </ul>
Relevant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relates to your racial equity goals</li> <li>• Relates to the process to get to racial equity goals</li> </ul>
Feasible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achievable with available time and resources</li> <li>• Ethical</li> </ul>
Time-limited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You have a stopping point</li> <li>• Accounts for resource limits</li> </ul>
Useful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Answer is more than “yes/no”</li> <li>• Someone wants this information (including you)</li> </ul>
Analytical rather than descriptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helps to inform decision-makers</li> <li>• Has a comparison group</li> </ul>

**IDENTIFY DATA NEEDED TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS, AND WHETHER THAT DATA ALREADY EXISTS OR NEEDS TO BE COLLECTED**

The DWGs then developed strategies to answer each question in their data plans. Identifying the data needed to answer a particular question is best done in partnership between program leads and data specialists within each institution, potentially with collaboration across institutions as needed. (See “Identifying data needed” in Appendix B on page 70.) To guide the DWGs, Vera drafted the following questions:

- What is the population of interest? Who are we interested in knowing something about?

- What is the right comparison group? Who should we be comparing or contrasting the population of interest to?
- What is the outcome, achievement, or event? What is the topic or place in the student life cycle we want to know about?
- How will you define race, ethnicity, gender, and other categories for equity analyses? What is the time range of interest?

After identifying what data they needed, the DWGs determined whether that data already existed in their own or other data systems. These other data systems might include longitudinal data systems, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), higher education offices, or other state agencies such as court systems or departments of labor. (See “Race and ethnicity categories in IPEDS” in Appendix B on page 69.) Researchers can use a codebook, also sometimes called a data dictionary, to compare data stored and managed by different agencies. A codebook describes the contents, structure, and layout of data. A well-documented codebook contains information intended to be complete and self-explanatory for each data element or variable in a data set.<sup>124</sup> DWGs shared codebooks internally to identify where data existed and what data groups could utilize to answer questions in the data plan. (See “Codebook components” in Appendix B on page 68.)

## **PLAN FOR LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY**

The DWGs needed an initial period of setup before they could move into implementing their data plans. Vera provided this structure and facilitation to the participating groups as part of the pilot project. As the pilot period ended, not all DWGs had moved past initialization and into implementation. Without the extra capacity offered by a pilot project, postsecondary institutions and DOCs will need to plan to provide this infrastructure to ensure continued collaboration, plan for near- and long-term outcomes, and commit to certain activities, resource sharing, and policy or practice changes to ensure sustainability. (See “Sample data working group sustainability plan” in Appendix B on page 71 for an example.)

## STUDENT VOICE COUNCILS CENTER STUDENT VOICE IN PEPS

As PEPs expand and access to education in prison continues to increase, programs must consider how to measure student outcomes holistically. Although quantitative data has its merits, it can fall short of capturing the nuanced aspects of students' experiences. Qualitative feedback can fill this gap.

Within PEPs, program administrators can offer students the opportunity to speak on issues related to program access and completion, instructional techniques, technology, financial aid policies, student services and supports, academic mentoring and counseling, and culturally responsive programming and teaching.

There are several benefits to collaborating with students in this way. Students have a unique perspective as participants that PEP and DOC staff lack. As such, their feedback is essential to better understand how effectively programs operate.

Seeking student feedback can also help PEPs measure things like engagement and motivation, which are not otherwise easily captured. Additionally, when students feel like their opinions matter, they are more likely to perform better and experience stronger feelings of self-worth and self-esteem.<sup>125</sup> Ultimately, gathering insights from students allows for program refinement and contributes to a more student-centered, effective, and responsive correctional education system.

The DOCs and PEPs participating in the REI Project shared an interest in soliciting student voice—both to help shape the REI Project itself and to pilot the model as a potential long-term structure for gathering and implementing student feedback. Building on a preexisting practice in Washington, Vera, together with PEPs and DOCs in Oklahoma and Michigan, sought to develop Student Voice Councils (SVCs).<sup>126</sup> These entities, incorporated into the PEP's operations, create avenues for students to provide feedback to PEPs and DOCs to inform possible interventions, thus improving programs. SVCs in the REI Project shared their input and

**Students have a unique perspective as participants that PEP and DOC staff lack. As such, their feedback is essential to better understand how effectively programs operate.**

proposed strategies for advancing equitable enrollment, completion rates, and outcomes among incarcerated students.

## HOW THE STUDENT VOICE COUNCILS WORKED

**Recruiting students.** Vera provided technical assistance to PEPs and DOCs to establish and launch the SVCs.<sup>127</sup> To assist with recruiting students, Vera and consultants developed a “frequently asked questions” document about the SVC, a flyer for PEPs to distribute, and criteria for selecting students for the council. PEPs recruited participants who varied across race, length of enrollment in a PEP, and time to release from incarceration to help ensure the students involved in each SVC represented a diversity of experiences and perspectives.<sup>128</sup>

**Initial challenges.** Once students had agreed to participate, Vera facilitated the first six meetings of each SVC to establish common practices and provide additional capacity to PEPs and DOCs during the pilot phase. After the first in-person meeting, Vera scheduled virtual meetings with students. Holding meetings in this medium proved challenging.<sup>129</sup> Although each state was ultimately able to use a virtual meeting platform, Vera staff still elected to travel twice more to meet with students in each of the participating 10 facilities in three states to build rapport and trust with and among students and administrators, continue troubleshooting challenges, and provide general guidance.

### Initial steps to create the first SVCs

Vera, colleges, and DOCs took the following steps to establish the initial Student Voice Councils.

- 1) Gained approval from Vera’s Institutional Review Board.
- 2) Met with colleges to discuss the recruitment process and inclusion criteria. From this, each college generated a list of recommended students for their council. The college conducted initial outreach using the flyer and FAQs document Vera created, and fielded student questions.

3) Each college then shared council member names with Vera and their partnering DOC. The DOC approved these lists and shared them with facility staff to ensure appropriate notifications to and movement permissions (i.e., “callouts”) for students to meet with Vera staff.

4) DOC correctional education leads facilitated security and background checks for Vera staff to clear them for facility entry. Upon DOC approval, Vera and the colleges began scheduling visits to the facilities where SVCs would exist.

5) Vera worked with DOC education staff to set up the initial meetings in a way that would allow for privacy during Vera’s initial interactions with students, during both in-person and virtual meetings. Students later asked that college and corrections administrators be invited to join the meetings, as students identified them as stakeholders key to advancing the changes students sought and support they needed to be effective.

SVC members also experienced varying ability to meet with each other in between meetings with Vera depending on the jurisdiction and the facility. SVC members did have the option to contact Vera staff through a corrections-specific messaging and email system, through which they were able to discuss next steps, report concerns, and request and receive resources. This communication helped keep the groups moving along in their development while Vera worked out the various logistical challenges with DOC partners.

Many of the challenges Vera and the students faced could be and were mediated by supportive partnerships, showing that DOC support at the facility and leadership levels is necessary to create resilient SVCs. The students require meeting spaces, appropriate callouts, places to store important documents (such as bylaws and meeting notes), supplies (such as pens and paper), and more. Much of this activity happens within the facility, but leadership will also likely have to buy into the effort to implement it. Vera found that communicating with DOC staff at the facility level while maintaining communication with state DOC leadership was a successful strategy to build support and ensure SVCs could meet.

## Group developmental lens

Vera facilitated the Student Voice Council meetings through the lens of Bruce Tuckman's Group Development Model.<sup>130</sup> This nonlinear model describes how groups achieve high performance and functionality. According to this theory, groups move through five stages: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Groups may move back and forth across the stages or occupy two at once.

- **Forming.** In the first stage, the group becomes acquainted and establishes ground rules. In this stage, certain structures develop, and members begin to establish rapport.
- **Storming.** In the second stage, members start to communicate more authentically, but may still see themselves as individuals rather than as a team. People may resist group leaders' control.
- **Norming.** In the third stage, people feel part of a team and realize that they can achieve more if they work together. There is also greater clarity around roles and responsibilities.
- **Performing.** In the fourth stage, the team works in an open and trusting atmosphere in which flexibility is key, and hierarchy is of little importance. The team works interdependently.
- **Adjourning.** In the final stage, the team recognizes members' contributions, assesses the process, and implements a plan to bring in new members as older ones leave.

**Meeting for a purpose.** Over the six meetings, the SVCs established council structures and made decisions about how the council would function. Though the council members needed time to establish rapport and cohesion, students came to the council with several ideas on how to improve the PEP, and they were



eager to share these with the appropriate audience. Vera helped students develop a presentation to PEP stakeholders that would serve two purposes: to concisely describe some of the issues they were experiencing and to make a case for why their existence as a council was important and how the SVC could benefit the program. Some issues extended past the PEP and focused on challenges with DOC program implementation. As such, students also invited DOC education leadership from the facility and central administration to listen to their concerns and ideas for solutions. In doing this, SVCs further advocated for their existence as a council and potential role in improving correctional programming. During these meetings, Vera grounded the group in the equity principles informing the REI Project—including exploring students’ perceptions of how race or ethnicity may have played a role in their own and other students or prospective students’ educational experiences—building a shared set of goals among SVC, PEP, and DOC participants. In the final meeting, the SVCs met with DOCs and PEPs to discuss strategies to sustain the SVCs beyond this project. Each DOC and PEP committed to continuing the SVCs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE STUDENT VOICE COUNCILS

Soliciting student feedback will require a significant shift in operations and mindsets for all stakeholders involved. Engaging student voice also requires programs to act on student feedback by updating policies and procedures to reflect the lessons learned. Below are four recommendations based on lessons Vera learned in this process. (SVC members also shared lessons learned from the REI project, which can be found in Appendix A on page 54.)

**Give the SVC time.** The PEPs hoped these students could act as liaisons with the student body from their launch. However, the SVCs first had to build rapport in order to speak freely and interact with each other before they could serve in that capacity. When these councils initially developed, members were often unfamiliar with each other, their roles, and the PEP’s goals. Over time, the council members were able to build relationships, understand their responsibilities, and develop a sense of purpose. By the third meeting, several councils began to build consensus on their

group's function as well as talk openly about concerns the SVC members and other people in the prison had about accessing and participating in PEPs. At this time, Vera observed councils experiencing the storming and norming phases as they handled internal conflicts, developed cohesion, and built trust. (See "Group developmental lens" on page 48.) Allowing for this process to unfold aids councils in developing conflict resolution skills and establishing clear communication channels. By the time the councils presented to the DOCs and PEPs in the final meetings, they were skillfully collaborating and well-positioned to offer feedback.

**Maximize diversity and representation in the council for more comprehensive insight.** Students may experience a PEP differently depending on their identities and experiences.<sup>131</sup> Representation of as many different experiences as possible within the SVC allows for the most comprehensive insight into the operation of the program and its impact. Representation is valuable for in-group dynamics, as well.<sup>132</sup> Prison social networks are typically homogenous across various characteristics such as race. People who are incarcerated may not have the opportunity to be regularly exposed to different groups and viewpoints. SVCs brought together people who might not ordinarily interact to work toward a common goal. As cohesion grew within the SVC, members gained skill in collaborating with students of all backgrounds, which contributed to their ability to become representatives of the student body. Through interactions in the SVC, members can experience changes in their own perceptions and see the different ways in which other members experienced their PEP. This positions them to be advocates for themselves and other students.

**Foster resiliency and transparency.** When developing an SVC, PEPs must maintain clear and transparent communication with SVC members regarding the purpose of collecting feedback and its subsequent use. Students should be prepared for some of their feedback to not be immediately acted on given the complexity of creating change within correctional facilities. What students share may show gaps in the PEP's operations or the DOC's support for the program, which may be challenging for representatives of these organizations to hear. In addition, some requested changes may not be achievable without statutory or policy change at the institutional,

state, or federal level. Transparency about what can and cannot be changed and demonstration of due diligence on the part of the PEPs and DOCs can foster resiliency. Although council members may have immediate suggestions to improve programs, they should be prepared for the time it will take to implement these changes. This patience is essential to allow for thoughtful consideration and strategic planning, which can ultimately result in more effective and sustainable improvements.

**Leverage student perspective and skills for other purposes.**

Originally, PEPs set out to obtain student feedback on their programs, but over time, several realized the multifaceted potential of these councils. Councils proved to be versatile and invaluable resources that could play vital roles in supporting PEP orientations, recruiting underserved populations, and tutoring. PEPs, DOCs, and students should consider how the charge of the SVC may evolve and be open to the SVC playing roles beyond providing feedback on programs. Vera found that students were willing to support both the PEPs and other students by expanding their roles on the councils and serving as in-prison representatives and advocates for PEPs. What role SVCs may play varies depending on need, but PEPs and DOCs should be flexible in their perceptions of what an SVC in prison is and how it can contribute to education programs.

# Conclusion

Pell reinstatement offers an opportunity to scale up high-quality postsecondary education programs in prisons to meet the programmatic needs of corrections agencies and the educational and career aspirations and goals of incarcerated students. To realize this potential, postsecondary institutions and corrections agencies must intentionally build PEPs with racial equity as a goal to ensure people from marginalized communities reap the benefits of high-quality education in prison. Doing so will help to fulfill the promise of postsecondary education for everyone, especially those who are disproportionately excluded from education and impacted by the criminal legal system.

Vera launched this project to gain a deeper understanding of equity issues across states, pilot interventions, and provide recommendations for strategies to advance racial equity in PEPs. This effort in Michigan, Oklahoma, and Washington highlights the need for PEP and corrections education administrators to collaboratively

- develop an understanding of the overlapping inequities that exist in the postsecondary and criminal legal systems, set equity goals, and implement policies and practices with a racial equity lens;
- collect, share, analyze, and use student data to measure outcomes and inform changes to policy and practice—Data Working Groups can create a venue for developing equity goals that are grounded in data; and
- center student experiences, perspectives, and ideas in program planning and implementation—Student Voice Councils can create an empowering venue for students to take agency in their own education programs and can help PEPs better meet the needs of their students.

This work requires engagement, commitment, and accountability from administrators at all levels, particularly PEP directors and

corrections education leaders. But it also demands the meaningful inclusion of those most impacted—the students.

This REI project was only one step toward advancing equity in corrections education practices. Vera hopes these recommended strategies will begin to shape more equitable policies and practices in PEPs, and that this collaboration among colleges, departments of correction, and students will inspire other system leaders to work together to advance equity in their own PEPs.

# Appendix A: First-person experiences of Student Voice Council members

## **TACOMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT VOICE COUNCIL, WASHINGTON CORRECTIONS CENTER FOR WOMEN, WASHINGTON**

The Tacoma Community College Student Voice Council of Washington Corrections Center for Women was established in 2017 by the dean of education, Sultana Shabazz. The founding members were chosen by the program educators and Shabazz. It is imperative that the members of the Student Voice Council are current students or graduates (alumni) of an educational program at your facility. The founding members worked diligently to construct foundational documents for the council to stand upon while maintaining a cohesive roster of at least two incarcerated student representatives from each educational program at our facility.

Foundational documents consisted of bylaws, a constitution, a letter of intent (purpose and mission) and an organizing system to formally document the SVC's progression and history. I call this organizing system the legacy model. As an SVC founding member, it has been vital to document all SVC projects, meeting minutes, templates, daily functions, proposals, and the results of all completed projects. The need for a legacy model was heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Incarcerated-led organizations and councils crumbled due to the shutdown and incarcerated student-led programs became obsolete. This brought awareness to the threat any organizing group may face due to the quick turnover of incarcerated student leadership. Having documents and leaving a legacy helps eliminate the threat of student-led groups dissipating because the next generation of student leaders will have documented information to reference or utilize as a guide to further evolve the council.

It is important to note that we as incarcerated students are resources to one another, but staff support is necessary throughout the process of maintaining the SVC because, as incarcerated students, it is unfortunately our reality of not being able to exert our independence and authority to access space, direct communication with one another or with outside organizations, and maintain a secure location for the SVC's documents. I also want to note that in order to make a smooth transition between leadership, once again thorough documentation of the day-to-day functions, activities, projects, and meetings are the key. When evolving the SVC, it is essential to consider all voices and have a diverse representation in the SVC. Diversity includes newer and older incarcerated generations within your facility, long-termers and short-termers, as well as diversity in the individual students' positionality and intersectionality.

A democratic voting system is used when making decisions within the SVC. After decisions are made, taking immediate action is what allows the SVC to thrive. We are an action-oriented council. By prioritizing our task, we ensure that a project is seen all the way through and completed.

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*This summary is written on behalf of the Student Voice Council (SVC) by chair Tiana Wood-Sims with collaborative efforts from co-chair Kallie Le Tellier, historian chair Mariah Boudrieau and activities chair Ilene Erwin.*

## EXCERPTS FROM SVC MEMBERS' RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONS VERA POSED TO THE SVC:

“SVC has helped to develop and better form education, for the entirety of the incarcerated population. SVC brings recognition to individualism and diversity within the prisons educational system.”

“SVC has opened up opportunities that allow our voices to be heard in regard to decisions being made about our education and by being able to voice firsthand real issues directly from the student population to the administration. Being able to be a part of the process gives us power to enhance and change the educational system to better fit the need of all within the incarcerated student population.”

“All of SVC’s decisions are put to a vote and discussed democratically, ensuring everyone’s input is shared and an agreement is reached.”

“Every member in SVC has a voice and thus we operate and make decisions like a democracy. We put together our thoughts and ideas as a collective. Every project or activity is done as a group. We vote together on everything. Every member’s voice is heard, and no decision is final until agreed by the council as a whole.”

“Throughout the entire process of SVC, we have needed all kinds of support. Starting with supporting one another as we grow into leaders, learning from each other, helping to work on and improve communication skills, as well as public speaking. We, as a council, provide a safe space for self-expression and individual growth. It has been pivotal having the support of the staff and education directors as well as the administration within the Department of Corrections Education to be available and help us hold meetings and being open to our ideas to the positive changes WE envision within the structure of education inside prison.”

“One way we’ve overcome hurdles is by being persistent with the communication of our needs through written proposals, emails, and phone calls so as to open up a line of dialogue.”



“There are many hurdles to overcome when trying to keep SVC alive and thriving. DOC has many structures and rules in place that make it hard to keep a consistent schedule or even a consistent education. There are cease movements, safety training, dining schedules and movement interruptions that hinder scheduled meetings and classes from taking place. We have to be adaptable around DOC policy when DOC should find flexibility around individuals working towards an education. DOC putting limitations on education or dictating qualifications for education hinders an individual in their path of rehabilitation.”

“SVC is an excellent way to support the student population by getting involved in the inner workings and politics of education within the prison system. It is a great way to practice leadership skills and allows a safe space to grow individually and as a team. SVC helps with communication skills and public speaking, and brings out hidden talents within an individual. SVC helps individuals to find their voices and teaches them how to put into words and actions the positive changes for a collective goal to better education for all incarcerated individuals.”

Advice for new groups or those wishing to start an SVC is be determined, set clear goals, and keep true to your mission—advocacy. Lean on one another and remember to never give up on your vision. It is necessary to have a formal written vision/mission statement, rules, and regulations for inner workings of the council, bylaws, letter of intent stating what SVC does, a breakdown of a written constitution, declaration of sentiment (purpose), parliamentary procedures, written guidelines about the order of business for every meeting, and knowledge of DOC policies. It is important for the Tacoma Community College Student Voice Council here at Washington Corrections Center for Women to share our experiences and knowledge. We are in high hopes that this information sharing will be of benefit to other incarcerated student leaders of the future.

**In Solidarity,**

**Tiana Wood-Sims, SVC Chair**

## **CALVIN PRISON INITIATIVE STUDENT VOICE COUNCIL, RICHARD A. HANDLON CORRECTIONAL FACILITY, MICHIGAN**

Our journey in establishing the Handlon Campus Student Voice Council has been both exciting and challenging at times. In this brief letter we share the history and some of the events we experienced in developing what eventuated into the Student Voice Council at Handlon Correctional Facility.

In 2021, by way of electronic messaging, Calvin University (Calvin Prison Initiative—CPI) staff sent all active students a message concerning Vera Institute of Justice’s interest in helping develop a student advisor group at the Handlon Correction Facility (hereafter referred to as Handlon campus). In 2022, students of CPI were informed that six active students were chosen by Vera to assist in this project: Wilson Rivera Bey, Ming Ho, Carlon Hughey, Emil Sporcic, Darron James, and Cesar Valladolid. Not long thereafter, we began the process of working to establish the Student Voice Council. The participating students, being from different cultural and religious backgrounds, brought with them different experiences and perspectives that proved beneficial to the process of developing the Student Voice Council at Handlon.

Our initial attempts to establish the Student Voice Council were less than favorable as we faced difficulties with establishing a proper meeting place where active students could meet to develop the Student Voice Council. This was primarily due to the fact that at that moment the selected students were housed in separate housing units. However, while inconvenient for meeting purposes, we managed to work around this reality by using our study hall time and space as an opportunity to meet.

Having established an initial meeting time and place, we understood that the first thing needed was to gauge each student’s sincerity and commitment to this project. Once each student agreed to give their full efforts into establishing the Student Voice Council, we set out to determine our organizational structure. We understood that

to be effective in this mission we were going to need a foundation to build upon. We decided unanimously what offices were going to be needed and who we believed would be best to fill them.

This form of agreement helped establish a democratic process by which the majority of the votes declared the decision-making process we engage in.

While the students were able to determine the positions ranging from a president to a treasurer, we faced the obstacle of developing the overall structure of the council. This was due, in large part, to the fact that, with the exception of one student, none of us had ever participated in any form of student council in our previous school experiences. However, during our first face-to-face meeting with Vera's representatives, we were offered the opportunity to receive and review examples of the organizational structures other states (and their facilities) had used in developing their Student Voice Council. This proved to be extremely helpful as it gave us a roadmap, or blueprint, to follow. It was during this time that Handlon administration began moving all active Calvin students to the same housing unit, which proved favorable because it gave us the opportunity to meet more often as we aimed to solidify our organizational structure.

During the process of working on developing the Student Voice Council's structure, we were afforded the opportunity to meet with the Handlon school principal and the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) education department at Lansing through Zoom technology. The meeting gave us an opportunity to gauge the MDOC's, Handlon's, as well as Calvin University's interest and sincerity in having an active Student Voice Council at Handlon. We were pleased and motivated to see that there was genuine interest and support on behalf of all parties, and so we continued the process of developing the Student Voice Council's structure.

After reviewing and discussing the examples of Student Voice Council structures sent by Vera through CPI, we determined that there was a need for creating and adopting our own set of bylaws to serve as the foundation for what eventually developed into a two-tiered organization combined to make up the Handlon Campus Student Voice Council. The Student Voice Council at

Handlon consists of the executive body, which is the voting and decision-making portion of the Student Voice Council, and the Voice Council class representatives, consisting of two students from each of the currently existing cohorts, or groups of students. Together with the student body at large, we make up the Student Voice Council at Handlon.

While we are still in the process of completely developing our structure, having adopted our current bylaws has given us a place to begin. Each participant has contributed greatly to the development of the Student Voice Council. While there were times of disagreement about the direction we each wanted the Student Voice Council to go, we also understood that it was not about each one of us, but about the interest of the student body at large. In every decision we made, we reflected upon the potential benefits and possible harm that could be visited upon the students at Handlon. Therefore, every decision was made bearing this in mind.

Lastly, we state that while the process of establishing the Student Voice Council was not simple due to the initial limited movement and our lack of knowledge about the process, the joy comes from experiencing the way in which we listened to each other, pushing our egos aside, all done in the interest of CPI's student body at Handlon. While not yet completely developed, the Student Voice Council is far enough along to be introduced to the student body at large, which we are currently preparing to do with the assistance of the Handlon school principal. We are hopeful.

### **Handlon SVC**

Wilson Rivera Bey

Ming Ho

Carlton Hughey

Emil Sporcic

Darron James

Cesar Valladolid

## **CONNORS STATE COLLEGE STUDENT VOICE COUNCIL, JESS DUNN CORRECTIONAL CENTER, OKLAHOMA**

Education in prison presents a special challenge. In Oklahoma, the overriding purpose is to provide secure detention, not to promote rehabilitation by furthering education and training. The rehabilitation of inmates in prison is a two-edged sword. On one side, a person struggles with the loss of freedom and identity because they are automatically labeled as an “offender” or “inmate” which leads to the stigma of being thought of as “less than” a normal member of society. However, on the other side, DOC is not here to hold an individual’s hand and show them how to battle personal and physical addictions, character flaws, trauma, and most importantly, a lack of education. The Department of Corrections’ job is simply to keep inmates alive to carry out the term of their incarceration and inmates are often told what to do and when to do it without explanation or questions. An inmate has to make the decision on their own to rehabilitate with the help of an insufficient number of dedicated people in the system who often find themselves overwhelmed with a large caseload of individuals. It is this group of inundated people and occasionally outside entities who shed light on the possibility that an inmate can be rehabilitated into a contributing member of the general public again. Education is a key piece of the puzzle in creating an overall picture of rehabilitation. A majority of incarcerated individuals test at a middle-school education level. Additionally, they tend to have a history of social exclusion, including an unsatisfactory relationship with education prior to their incarceration. While the importance of obtaining a GED cannot be overstated, educational opportunities should not stop at that point. Recidivism rates decrease dramatically for inmates that have attended college during incarceration. Most DOC administrators consider a GED to be more important than attending college and limit their support of prison-based higher education programs.

Inmates learn not to speak up or question authority and are often made to feel that their opinions do not matter because they have no right to be treated as a normal person. Creating a student voice council that strives to highlight the importance of incorporating

student voices and perspectives in educational matters in prison is one of the most impactful things that imprisoned individuals can do to promote fellow inmates to increase personal rehabilitation, which subsequently leads to decreased recidivism rates. A lack of education generates instability, poverty, and for some, a feeling that there is no other way to make money than to participate in criminal activities, which eventually brings them right back to prison. Choices to drop out of school often lead to low-wage jobs and/or crime. Getting out of these societal prisons is often a grueling and arduous journey. There are many people at the bottom of the ladder looking for the next rung to climb up and escape the abysmal pit of poverty. Educated individuals have an enhanced chance of finding higher paying jobs when released from prison than people who do not have a GED or college degree. This in part aids in the reduction of poverty rates which help keep released inmates from re-offending. Convincing society—including their community, friends, and family—that they are honest and trustworthy will be problematic. It will be a slow process for employers and society at large to accept that they are anything other than an ex-offender. Education is an integral part of developing integrity, trust, and honesty. A Student Voice Council is just the structure needed to nurture these important characteristics along with encouraging motivation, persistence, cooperation, civil debate, and the creation of social capital which is often defined as our connections with others, our networks, and the things we do for each other.

“It is like the golden rule. I’ll do this for you now knowing that, down the road, you will return the favor or pay it forward... I think education changes lives. Seeing these guys have a chance to be successful and believe in themselves, that’s what this education program should be all about.”

**Aaron Waldrip**

The essential plan in developing a Student Voice Council was to find current college students and recently graduated college students who share a move-forward thought process. The first step in preparing this plan for a Student Voice Council is to gather people who seize opportunities when they arise and are goal-oriented future planners that believe everyone’s opinion matters regardless

of race or ethnicity. The second step is to create a vision of what the SVC will represent and who and what they will fight for to benefit higher education opportunities. The third and final step is to recognize the support systems, social capital, and limitations that can be available to further the vision and opportunities for current students and potential students who are incarcerated. When all of these steps come together, new ideas and fresh perspectives will be curated, paths become clearer, relationships and bridges are built, and a team of people become stronger, while individuals feel empowered and the SVC's vision for a better future for incarcerated people matters.

“The steps to creating our higher education learning panel were fairly easy, given the tools we were provided. A representative from our Jess Dunn Education Department and a Connors State College Representative have been the most important tools we needed.”

**Corinthian Moore**

“My experiences in the creation of a student voice council revolve mainly around three main aspects. Who we are, what we can do, and what sort of world we leave for others. I think inmates are more honest than university students outside the fence. Inmates are ‘real’, they don’t care what the professor wants to hear, they only say what they care to say, whereas university students play the ‘education game’ and give answers back that they think the professor wants. There is a different discussion atmosphere in the prisons versus the universities.”

**Aaron Waldrip**

We modeled a great deal of our decision-making on how this council will operate with the help of Roberts Rules of Order. We also had assistance from someone on the council who had a small amount of prior experience in creating this type of assembly. These combined foundations afforded a checks and balances approach to decision making. Our decisions were also based on civilized discussions instead of ill-mannered debate by simply listening before speaking. We also embraced diversity and the understanding that we have much in common while still celebrating our differences. We strive not to judge others, but instead, hold up a mirror to ourselves

and try to discover why others are different. Lastly, we endeavor to be civil, respectful, empathetic, and democratic when making decisions. This is accomplished by putting in place bylaws that address the council's purpose, management, membership, duties, appointments, rules of order, meeting logistics, standards, discipline, voting procedures, and amendments.

“The leadership panel as a collective group developed and revised by-laws. We voted in a President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Sergeant-at-Arms, and Coordinators. The panel consists of a diverse group from different racial and ethnic backgrounds as well as current and graduate students. Our goal is to increase the number of new and returning students to help educate and rehabilitate. We look forward to the continued support from Connors State College.”

**David Mellor**

“My experience has been pretty straight forward and simple. Our decision-making process is simple, we decide things by voting as a group where we follow ‘Robert’s Rules’.... I am excited to work with our group to create a new position to replace the treasurer.”

**Brixton Schuman**

Having outside support to fill in the gaps created by inexperience and logistical limitations was necessary for what felt like a monumental undertaking. This was graciously provided by the Vera Institute of Justice. Without their motivation, commitment, experience, compassion, and persistence, this council would have never been created and inmates would have never moved from a fixed mindset that told them they are not good at this to a growth mindset that tells them they are not good at this...yet! By facilitating face-to-face meetings, Vera was able to help inmates interested in forming the council to focus on the progress of set goals by always asking, “Where were you? Where are you now? Where do you want to be?” Vera was vital in creating necessary connections between the Oklahoma Department of Corrections and Connors State College, and the Student Voice Council by fostering communication, mutual respect, and recognition.



“I was very honored when asked to be on this panel. For one, it has made my thoughts change that someone has cared for others’ education. My opinion has greatly changed in a way that I have not comprehended. Vera has been a great deal of help on this subject and has caused my feelings to change for people in this field. With each meeting, I am further educated and also remain in the same mindset that our panel can have a voice and opinion on an inmate’s education. I do want to continue this endeavor so that others along with myself can see that even though we as men are in prison; we can be someone that has meaning to ourselves and to others.”

**Johnny Garcia**

While we are in the infancy of our student council, there are several takeaways and perspective bits of guidance that we can give to currently incarcerated individuals that are passionate about educational opportunities. First, simply by being here with an open mind and investing in yourself, you ultimately give back to everyone around you. Endeavor to discover the power of your story, but also step into others’ shoes. Think of who is the recipient of what you do. Listen and observe. See what is and is not available. Be naive and know there are no stupid questions. It’s O.K. not to know. Change your attitude toward rejection and wear it like a badge of honor. All that should matter to you is to keep moving forward. Promote a desire to move students beyond the walls in their thoughts and future plans. What you do from here is up to you.

“I feel that the most important thing to setting up an SVC is to have people who really care about those that come after us and want others to succeed. The people selected to the SVC need to be here for the right reasons, they have to be able to discuss topics without taking things personally that don’t go their way. They have to be teachable and want to teach others. I also believe it is important to try to find books on parliamentary procedures and read them to grasp an understanding of how meetings are conducted. We must go out and talk with fellow students to see what they feel needs to be done in order to bring those needs to the council. Maybe with fresh ideas you can learn something new and prompt an idea/bylaw to come up for discussion.”

**Justin Deluna**

“By participating in the student voice panel, I have learned what it is to work together to accomplish goals of organizing meetings, forming a council and gathering different opinions to come together for the same purpose. I have learned to listen to others even if I don’t agree, people can still find common ground to find solutions.”

**Santiago Ruiz, Jr.**

**Higher Education Leadership Panel:**

Aaron Waldrip, President

Johnny Garcia, Vice-President

Justin Deluna, Secretary

Brixton Schuman, Treasurer

David Mellor, Sgt-at-Arms

Santiago Ruiz Jr., Coordinator

Rashad Newsome, Coordinator

Nickolas Grass, Coordinator

Corinthian Moore, Coordinator

# Appendix B: Data Working Group additional tools and guidance

## EXAMPLE GOAL AND INTENDED OUTCOMES FOR A STATE DATA WORKING GROUP

### Goal:

PEPs and DOCs collaboratively will leverage data to assess and make changes to policy and procedures that can promote racial/ethnic equity and inclusion in postsecondary education in prison programs.

### Outcomes:

Working together from [month and year] through [month and year], members of the [state] Data Working Group will:

- understand roles for data collection among all institutions in the REI project;
- consider questions related to race, equity, and inclusion in postsecondary education in prison that could be used to inform decision-making about student recruitment, enrollment, persistence, completion, and post-completion outcomes;
- determine which questions can be answered with available data within and across each institution, which additional actors and datasets should be considered, what data is still needed, and how to take next steps where necessary;
- understand what a racial equity lens is, and develop increased capacity and skills to apply a racial equity lens to data analysis and data-informed decision-making;
- develop increased capacity and skills to communicate findings stemming from data analysis conducted through a racial equity lens; and

- develop working relationships across the participating PEPs, DOCs, and other actors in the state or national postsecondary education data ecosystem to ensure ongoing collaboration and improve alignment of data systems and availability.

## CODEBOOK COMPONENTS:

- *Variable names* typically give quick indicators of the information presented by the variable. These names should be unique.
- *Variable labels* are abbreviated variable descriptions (maximum of 40 characters) that can be used to identify the variable. This is an extended version of the variable name.
- *Answer labels* provide exhaustive and mutually exclusive potential answer options for a variable that uses categories. Variables that are numeric, capture dates, or are open-ended do not have answer labels.
- *Variable type* determines what type of value a variable can have and what operations can be performed.
  - *Numeric variables* contain only numbers and are suitable for numeric calculations.
  - *Categorical string variables* may contain letters, numbers, and other characters but are restricted to a limited set of answer options. It is not possible to perform calculations on string variables, but data users can make simple crosstabs.
  - *Open-ended string variables* may contain letters, numbers, and other characters, but are *not* restricted to a set of options. These are difficult to analyze and the choice of when to use them should be made carefully.
  - *Date variables* capture dates or time periods, such as a specific calendar date or perhaps a semester or term.

## **RACE AND ETHNICITY CATEGORIES IN IPEDS**

The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) uses the following categorizations for race and ethnicity of students: Hispanic; American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; white; two or more races; and unknown race and ethnicity. This schema at first does not appear to be mutually exclusive, as people with Hispanic ethnicity may be of any race. The IPEDS race and ethnicity reporting categories are actually Hispanic (any race); American Indian or Alaska Native (non-Hispanic); Asian (non-Hispanic); Black or African American (non-Hispanic); Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (non-Hispanic); white (non-Hispanic); two or more races (non-Hispanic); and unknown race and ethnicity.

Using standardized categories is an important part of compliance reporting and making comparisons across institutions of postsecondary education and across geographies. However, PEPs and DOCs should consider whether these categories used for compliance reporting adequately represent students within their programming, or whether they wish to explore additional categories. For example, it may be that tribal affiliation, or having no tribal membership, is an important part of the postsecondary experience of students with Native American or Indigenous ancestry. Adding further categories to capture race and ethnicity may be important in this case.

PEPs and DOCs may wish to maintain information on students' race and ethnicity using an open-ended string variable type (variables that contain letters, numbers, and other characters but are not restricted to a set of options, as defined above). Using this variable type fully empowers students to self-identify their own race and ethnicity without having to conform to a preset menu of options. However, expanding the number of potential answer options may present challenges to using that data to evaluate progress toward program goals.

## IDENTIFYING DATA NEEDED

A PEP may have a goal of ensuring representative recruitment by race and ethnicity. A question that the PEP could ask might be: “How do the demographics of our students in the last financial aid year compare to those of all people eligible to participate?” The program may identify data and an analysis plan to answer this question by understanding the following:

- The *population of interest* is students in the last financial aid year.
- The *right comparison group* is people who are incarcerated who meet eligibility requirements to participate in postsecondary education.
- The *event* is recruitment.
- The *categories for subgroup analysis of the outcome* would require race and ethnicity categories used by the PEP and those used by the DOC to be brought into alignment.
- The *time range of interest* is the last financial aid year, running from July 1 in one year to June 30 in the next.

Correctional education leads may share the same goal and wish to understand how eligibility policy may affect the representativeness of newly recruited students, asking the question, “how do the demographics of incarcerated people eligible for postsecondary education compare to all people currently incarcerated in this state?” For this question:

- The *population of interest* is people who are incarcerated who are eligible for postsecondary education due to their academic credentials, behavior history, programmatic completion, and location. Correctional education leads may wish to identify four populations of interest: those who have the necessary academic credential; those who meet thresholds for behavioral history; those who have completed other necessary programming; and those who are housed where postsecondary education programs are offered, if relevant.

- The *right comparison group* is all people who are incarcerated at a point in time.
- The *outcome* is eligibility.
- The *categories for subgroup analysis of the outcome* are DOC race and ethnicity categories.
- The *time range of interest* could be within a single year or at a single point in time.

**SAMPLE DATA WORKING GROUP SUSTAINABILITY PLAN**

**DATA WORKING GROUP SUSTAINABILITY PLAN**

The Department of Corrections and colleges in \_\_\_\_\_ have identified an initial area(s) of focus for the Data Working Group (DWG):  
 Initial area of focus: \_\_\_\_\_  
 This includes \_\_\_\_\_

INFRASTRUCTURE	SHORT TERM OUTCOMES	LONG-TERM OUTCOMES	COMMITMENTS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continued collaboration across DOC and college program leads.</li> <li>2. DWG listservs.</li> <li>3. Monthly / bimonthly / quarterly meetings with DOC as convener of program leads.</li> <li>4. DWG called upon with clear data requests in service to collaboration's area of focus.</li> <li>5. Student Voice Councils (SVCs) that provide input for area of focus and use of data for REI.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pell Restoration data collection aligned.</li> <li>2. Strengthened DOC policies for college participation.</li> <li>3. Strengthened relationships, access to each other (e.g., listserv).</li> <li>4. Data and student voice leveraged to make changes to policy and procedures.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Established venue for collaboration across DOC and colleges.</li> <li>2. DWG tied to state-wide consortium.</li> <li>3. Consistent and skilled application of a racial equity lens.</li> <li>4. Strong network of statewide program, data, policy leads working in concert in service to co-developed priorities.</li> <li>5. Data quality and analytics member in DWG.</li> <li>6. Data sharing agreement in place.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. DOC to convene monthly / bimonthly / quarterly.</li> <li>2. Colleges to commit that program leads will attend convenings.</li> <li>3. Colleges and DOC to commit to pull data when requests are made.</li> <li>4. Colleges to continue SVCs and incorporate student voices into defining and prioritizing race equity goals and questions.</li> <li>5. DOC and colleges continue to develop intra-institutional capacity to ask and answer questions with data.</li> </ol>

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Final Regulations: Pell Grants for Prison Education Programs; Determining the Amount of Federal Education Assistance Funds Received by Institutions of Higher Education (90/10); Change in Ownership and Change in Control, 87 Fed. Reg. 65426, October 28, 2022, <https://perma.cc/3395-Y425>, corrected by 87 Fed. Reg. 68900, November 17, 2022, <https://perma.cc/7VU6-B8TR>.
- 2 While the project's initial focus included equity across race/ethnicity and gender, most of the activities focused on race/ethnicity due to capacity.
- 3 For further reading on turning higher education equity intentions into concrete actions, see Tia Brown McNair, Estela Mara Bensimon and Lindsey Malcom-Piqueux, *From Equity Talk to Equity Walk: Expanding Practitioner Knowledge for Racial Justice in Higher Education* (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2020).
- 4 Race Forward, "What is Racial Equity?" <https://perma.cc/47BA-M68C>.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Please note that this definition addresses the use of data—a "statistical sense"—to help assess progress in advancing racial equity. Racial equity is a goal that requires action and therefore data from multiple institutions—particularly in the criminal legal system and in postsecondary education, two systems with profound impacts on welfare that have long histories of racial inequity.
- 7 Center for Assessment and Policy Development and WorldTrust, "Racial Equity Tools: Glossary," <https://perma.cc/86XY-KWP2>.
- 8 Anti-oppression Resource and Training Alliance (AORTA), *Uprooting White Supremacy in Organizations* (Philadelphia: AORTA, 2023), 1, <https://perma.cc/33TD-G635>.
- 9 See generally William J. Sabol, Thaddeus L. Johnson, and Alexander Caccavale, *Trends in Correctional Control by Race and Sex* (Washington, DC: Council on Criminal Justice, 2019), <https://perma.cc/BY4X-XW5Z>; and Elizabeth Kai Hinton, LeShae Henderson, and Cindy Reed, *An Unjust Burden: The Disparate Treatment of Black Americans in the Criminal Justice System* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2018), <https://www.vera.org/publications/for-the-record-unjust-burden>.
- 10 For improved outcomes associated with education in prison see generally Robert Bozick, Jennifer Steele, Lois Davis, et al., "Does Providing Inmates with Education Improve Postrelease Outcomes? A Meta-Analysis of Correctional Education Programs in the United States," *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 14, no. 3 (2018), 389-428, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325342681\\_Does\\_providing\\_inmates\\_with\\_education\\_improve\\_postrelease\\_outcomes\\_A\\_meta-analysis\\_of\\_correctional\\_education\\_programs\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325342681_Does_providing_inmates_with_education_improve_postrelease_outcomes_A_meta-analysis_of_correctional_education_programs_in_the_United_States); Lois M. Davis, Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, et al., *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs that Provide Education* (Washington, DC: RAND, 2017), <https://perma.cc/C3FG-KJUL>; Patrick Oakford, Cara Brumfield, Casey Goldvale, et al., *Investing in Futures: Economic and Fiscal Benefits of Postsecondary Education in Prison* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2019), <https://www.vera.org/publications/investing-in-futures-education-in-prison>; Amanda Pompoco, John Woolredge, Melissa Lugo, et al., "Reducing Inmate Misconduct and Prison Returns with Facility Education Programs," *Criminology & Public Policy* 16, no. 2 (2017), 515-547; and Susan Sturm and Vivian Nixon, *Home-Grown Social Capital: How Higher Education for Formerly Incarcerated Women Facilitates Family and Community Transformation* (Washington, DC: Ascend at the Aspen Institute, 2015), 34-37, <https://perma.cc/8U65-NEMS>.
- 11 This report focuses primarily on racial equity given the outsize role race plays in a person's experience and outcomes in the education and criminal legal systems.
- 12 Complete College America, *Building on Completion Gains: Amplifying Progress and Closing Persistent Gaps* (Indianapolis, IN: Complete College America, 2022), 5, <https://perma.cc/U5GJ-TCV4>.
- 13 For PEP and college demographics see Kelsie Chesnut and Allan Wachendorfer, *Second Chance Pell: Four Years of Expanding Access to Education in Prison* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2021), 2, <https://www.vera.org/publications/second-chance-pell-four-years-of-expanding-access-to-education-in-prison>. Quantification of the magnitude of overrepresentation of people of color in prison is available in Table 5 in E. Ann Carson, *Prisoners in 2021-Statistical Tables* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2022), 13, <https://perma.cc/UL2J-ZK5L>.
- 14 Niloufer Taber and Asha Muralidharan, *Second Chance Pell: Six Years of Expanding Higher Education Programs in Prisons, 2016-2022* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2023), 4, <https://www.vera.org/publications/second-chance-pell-six-years-of-expanding-access-to-education-in-prison>. For the purpose of the project and this report, the authors relied on the race and ethnicity categorizations in the administrative data analyzed. Because institutions record racial and ethnic identities from a limited set of officially recognized categories, the terminology used to describe



the information from the dataset does not always align with Vera's current style or community preferences; nor do institutions such as colleges use the same identity categories as the criminal legal system. Criminal legal system data collection is particularly fraught for Latinx populations, which encompass multiple racial and ethnic identities—meaning that the way Latinx people are officially categorized in the research and datasets referenced may conflict with how they self-identify. For example, they may be categorized as Hispanic and prefer to identify as being of Latino/a/x/e descent. Additionally, in datasets that do not account for intersectionality, some Latinx people (e.g., Black or Afro-Latinx people) are misrepresented and categorized by a portion of their identity (e.g., solely Black or solely Hispanic).

- 15 Uma Mazyck Jayakumar and Ibram X. Kendi, “‘Race Neutral’ Is the New ‘Separate but Equal,’” *The Atlantic*, June 29, 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/06/supreme-court-affirmative-action-race-neutral-admissions/674565/>.
- 16 See generally Adewale A. Maye, *Advancing Anti-Racist Economic Research and Policy: The Myth of Race-Neutral Policy* (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2022), <https://perma.cc/2VG3-QCVS>.
- 17 FAFSA Simplification Act, Pub.L. 116-260, Title VII, Division FF (2020); and Federal Student Aid, “(GEN-23-05) Eligibility of Confined or Incarcerated Individuals to Receive Pell Grants,” U.S. Department of Education, March 29, 2023, <https://perma.cc/29P6-UX4E>. See also Niloufer Taber and Asha Muralidharan, *Second Chance Pell: Six Years of Expanding Higher Education Programs in Prisons, 2016-2022* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2023), 11, <https://www.vera.org/publications/second-chance-pell-six-years-of-expanding-access-to-education-in-prison>.
- 18 Gerard Robinson and Elizabeth English, *The Second Chance Pell Pilot Program: A Historical Overview* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2017), 2, <https://perma.cc/4F6P-6VZ3>; and Cassandra Dortch, *Federal Pell Grant Program of the Higher Education Act: Primer* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2023), 1, <https://perma.cc/F396-NE36>.
- 19 Robinson and English, *The Second Chance Pell Pilot Program*, 2017, 2.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 1
- 21 Richard Tewksbury and Jon Marc Taylor, “The Consequences of Eliminating Pell Grant Eligibility for Students in Post-Secondary Correctional Education Programs,” *Federal Probation* 60, no. 3 (1996), 61.
- 22 Robinson and English, *The Second Chance Pell Pilot Program: A Historical Overview*, 2017, 2.
- 23 *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences*, edited by Jeremy Travis, Bruce Western, and Steve Redburn (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2014), 2-3, 70-103, <https://doi.org/10.17226/18613>.
- 24 Robinson and English, *The Second Chance Pell Pilot Program: A Historical Overview*, 2017, 2-3; and Holly Avey, Lili Farhang, Marnie Purciel-Hill, et al., *Turning on the Tap: How Returning Access to Tuition Assistance for Incarcerated People Improves the Health of New Yorkers* (Oakland, CA: Human Impact Partners, 2015), 6-7, <https://perma.cc/F6QS-YA3P>.
- 25 See for example Michigan Department of Corrections, “Vocational Village,” <https://perma.cc/P6C7-S2UK>.
- 26 Carmen Heider and Karen Lehman, “Education and Transformation: An Argument for College in Prison,” *Critical Education* 10, no. 9 (2019), 1-13, <https://perma.cc/8RDR-7DTN>; and Susan Sturm and Vivian Nixon, *Home-Grown Social Capital: How Higher Education for Formerly Incarcerated Women Facilitates Family and Community Transformation* (Washington, DC: Ascend at the Aspen Institute, 2015), 34-37, <https://perma.cc/8U65-NEMS>.
- 27 A 2018 meta-analysis found that all types of education, on average, lower recidivism by 28 percent among participants. When looking specifically at postsecondary education, the odds ratio of recidivism among postsecondary students versus those who did not participate was 0.52, or a 48 percent (1.00 - 0.52 = 0.48) reduction in the odds of recidivism. Robert Bozick, Jennifer Steele, Lois Davis, et al., “Does Providing Inmates with Education Improve Postrelease Outcomes? A Meta-Analysis of Correctional Education Programs in the United States,” *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 14, no. 3 (2018), 389-428, Table 3. For correctional leadership support, see Doug Irving, “The Case for Correctional Education in U.S. Prisons,” *The RAND Blog*, January 3, 2016, <https://perma.cc/9GXS-CVA2>.
- 28 U.S. Department of Education, “Secretary DeVos Expands Second Chance Pell Experiment, More than Doubling Opportunities for Incarcerated Students to Gain Job Skills and Earn Postsecondary Credentials,” press release (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, April 24, 2020), <https://perma.cc/2UXK-JDXT>.
- 29 U.S. Department of Education, “U.S. Department of Education Announces Expansion of Second Chance Pell Experiment and Actions to Help Incarcerated Individuals Resume Educational Journeys and Reduce Recidivism,” press release (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, April 26, 2022), <https://perma.cc/5ABM-CTFX>.

- 30 FAFSA Simplification Act, Pub.L. 116-260, Title VII, Division FF (2020); and Final Regulations: Pell Grants for Prison Education Programs; Determining the Amount of Federal Education Assistance Funds Received by Institutions of Higher Education (90/10); Change in Ownership and Change in Control, 87 Fed. Reg. 65426, October 28, 2022, <https://perma.cc/3395-Y425>, corrected by 87 Fed. Reg. 68900, November 17, 2022, <https://perma.cc/7VU6-B8TR>. To become approved “Prison Education Programs” as defined by the FAFSA Simplification Act, colleges and universities must seek approval from corrections system authorities—or “oversight entities”—college accreditors, and the U.S. Department of Education. PEPs will be expected to meet “student best interest factors,” as defined in the regulations and by oversight entities, which include ensuring programs are of comparable quality to those offered to students who are not incarcerated. Myra Hyder, *Accessing Pell Grants for College Programs in Correctional Settings: A Summary of the Regulations and Requirements* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2023), <https://www.vera.org/publications/accessing-pell-grants-for-college-programs-in-correctional-settings>.
- 31 See Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance, “Uprooting White Supremacy in Organizations,” <https://perma.cc/U4K2-XRFV>. For guidance on addressing racism on an interpersonal level, see Layla F. Saad, *Me and White Supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2020).
- 32 For the purpose of the project and this report, the authors relied on the race and ethnicity categorizations in the administrative data analyzed. Because institutions record racial and ethnic identities from a limited set of officially recognized categories, the terminology used to describe the information from the dataset does not always align with Vera’s current style or community preferences, nor do institutions such as colleges use the same identity categories as the criminal legal system. Vera uses the term Indigenous to describe Native American, American Indian, and Alaska Native populations. The term is also inclusive of First Nations people from Australia and Canada, as well as other Indigenous peoples worldwide, although it is unclear if any of these populations are included in the datasets. For disparities in the criminal legal system related to race, see Mike Wessler, “Updated charts provide insights on racial disparities, correctional control, jail suicides, and more,” Prison Policy Initiative, May 19, 2022, <https://perma.cc/LAU7-CLH2>; National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), *Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Justice System* (Washington DC: NCSL, 2022); Wendy Sawyer, “How Race Impacts Who Is Detained Pretrial,” Prison Policy Initiative, October 9, 2019, <https://perma.cc/Z9VE-CEME>; and ACLU and The Sentencing Project, *Racial Disparities in Sentencing in the United States* (Submission to 107th Session of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, August 11-20, 2022), <https://perma.cc/XXH4-8DWJ>. See also Peter Wagner and Daniel Kopf, *The Racial Geography of Mass Incarceration* (Northampton, MA: Prison Policy Initiative, 2015), <https://perma.cc/9YV5-29BB>. For disparities in the criminal legal system related to gender identity and sexual orientation, see Alexi Jones, “Visualizing the Unequal Treatment of LGBTQ People in the Criminal Justice System,” Prison Policy Initiative, March 2, 2021, <https://perma.cc/39WW-DYLW>; and Jason Lydon, Kamaria Carrington, Hana Low, et al., *Coming Out of Concrete Closets: A Report on Black & Pink’s National LGBTQ Prisoner Survey* (Omaha, NE: Black & Pink, 2015), <https://perma.cc/59JV-59BZ>. Low income is both a predictor and a consequence of criminal legal system involvement, with effects of incarceration on wealth differing by race. Christian E. Weller, Akua Amaning, and Rebecca Vallas, *America’s Broken Criminal Legal System Contributes to Wealth Inequality* (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 2022), <https://perma.cc/JXL7-97XE>. For further discussion of how race and income interact in predicting incarceration, and how the income and wealth consequences of incarceration differ by race, see Khaing Zaw, Darrick Hamilton, and William Darity Jr., “Race, Wealth, and Incarceration: Results from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth,” *Race and Social Problems* 8, no. 1, (2016), 103-115, 111-112, <https://perma.cc/TW4V-UX79>. For a quantification of the income impacts of incarceration, see Adam Looney and Nicholas Turner, *Work and Opportunity Before and After Incarceration* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2018), 1, <https://perma.cc/YK8D-6CJ3>. For a discussion of how incarceration also conceals part of the Black-white and Latinx-white income gap, see Terry-Ann Craigie, Ames Grawert, Cameron Kimble, et al., *Conviction, Imprisonment, and Lost Earnings: How Involvement with the Criminal Justice System Deepens Inequality* (New York: Brennan Center for Justice, 2020), 13-15, 34, <https://perma.cc/DX3Q-GUUS>. For disparities in higher education related to race, see Samuel D. Museus, María C. Ledesma, and Tara L. Parker, “Systemic Racism in Higher Education,” in *Racism and Racial Equity in Higher Education*, edited by Kelly Ward and Lisa E. Wolf-Wendel (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Periodicals, 2015), 49-71 (also published as *ASHE Higher Education Report* 42, no. 1 [2015]). For disparities in higher education related to gender identity and sexual orientation, see Kathryn O’Neill, Kerith J. Conron, Abbie E. Goldberg, et al., *Experiences of LGBTQ People in Four-Year Colleges and Graduate Programs* (Los Angeles: UCLA Williams Institute, 2022), 65, <https://perma.cc/JJV7-YA3C>. Although women are currently overrepresented in higher education—there are roughly three women students for every two men—and women ages 25-34 are more likely to hold a degree than similarly aged men, there are still disparities in the student experience, including what career fields are marketed to women, their prevalence in higher education leadership and faculty, and their overrepresentation as survivors of on-campus violence. See Ellie Bothwell, Jaime Félix Roser Chinchilla, Emma Deraze, et al., *Gender Equality: How Global Universities Are Performing* (London: Times Higher

Education, 2022), 10, <https://perma.cc/SS5K-6YXR>; RAINN, “Campus Sexual Violence Statistics,” <https://perma.cc/99S8-WBNE>; and Richard Reeves and Ember Smith, “Boys Left Behind: Education Gender Gaps Across the US,” Brookings Institution, October 12, 2022, <https://perma.cc/CU7H-CKAH>. For disparities in higher education related to income, see Margaret W. Cahalan, Marisha Addison, Nicole Brunt, et al., *Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States: 2022 Historical Trend Report* (Washington, DC: The Pell Institute, 2022), <https://perma.cc/L9UC-TKCM>.

- 33 Throughout the history of the United States, a racial hierarchy in which white people are at the top and other races, notably Black people, are at the bottom has been codified into law. Examples such as the three-fifths compromise (which classified Black people as less than human), post-Reconstruction Jim Crow laws, and *Plessy v. Ferguson* (which legalized segregation) all represent this framework. See Victor Ray, *On Critical Race Theory Why It Matters and Why You Should Care* (New York: Random House, 2023), xxix, xxxiii, 74–79. Access to education has been withheld as a result of and to uphold this racial hierarchy, in acts such as creating anti-literacy laws that made it illegal for enslaved Black people to read and write, segregating white and Black schools, and barring Black students from attending white colleges and universities. See National Museum of African American History & Culture, “Part 3: Slavery & the Making of a New Nation | Chapter 05: Making a Way | Section III: Illegal to Read,” <https://perma.cc/PE26-7RD4>; Library of Congress, “A Century of Racial Segregation: *Brown v. Board* at Fifty: ‘With an Even Hand,’” <https://perma.cc/HH4P-Y354>; and Linda Darling-Hammond, “Unequal Opportunity: Race and Education,” Brookings Institution, March 1, 1998, <https://perma.cc/XEK3-6BNQ>. For a current perspective on the structural and governmental role in racial inequities in access to education, see U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Racial Disparities in Education and the Role of Government*, June 29, 2020, <https://perma.cc/9B7P-TMUU>. For a historical overview, see Sonya Ramsey, “The Troubled History of American Education After the Brown Decision,” *American Historian*, February 2017, <https://perma.cc/K3FH-XBWJ>.
- 34 Museum, Ledesma, and Parker, “Systemic Racism in Higher Education,” 2015. See also Illeana Najarro, “How Is White Supremacy Embedded in School Systems Today? A Scholar Explains,” *Education Week*, November 3, 2022, <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/how-is-white-supremacy-embedded-in-school-systems-today-a-scholar-explains/2022/11>.
- 35 For example, legacy admissions, targeted recruitment and the use of early decision—preferred by students who can commit to a single college without having to consider different financial aid packages—all select toward a higher income and less diverse student body. See Katharine Meyer and Adrianna Pita, “How Will the Supreme Court’s Affirmative Action Ruling Affect College Admissions?” Brookings Institution, June 30, 2023, <https://perma.cc/M29A-78QG>; and Kelia Washington, “Racial Equity in Higher Education Starts in the Admissions Office,” *Urban Institute*, June 18, 2020, <https://perma.cc/9GC6-54B5>.
- 36 For inequities in placement tests, see Elisabeth A. Barnett, Elizabeth Kopko, Dan Cullinan, et al., *Who Should Take College-Level Courses?* (New York: Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness, 2020), iv, <https://perma.cc/CQ78-294E>. Developmental courses in reading, writing, and math have traditionally been offered to remediate learning gaps and prepare students for college-level courses. However, multiple studies have shown that this system hinders academic progress and has disproportionately negative effects for students of color and low-income students. See Forrest Helvie, “How to Prevent Worsening Developmental Ed Equity Gaps in a COVID-19 Landscape,” *EAB*, July 31, 2020, <https://perma.cc/7D7D-9WQT>; Susan Bickerstaff, Katie Beal, Julia Raufman et al., *Five Principles for Reforming Developmental Education: A Review of the Evidence* (New York, Center for the Analysis of Postsecondary Readiness, 2022), <https://perma.cc/LK2B-UJSD>; and Oliver Schak, Ivan Metzger, Jared Bass, et al., *Developmental Education: Challenges and Strategies for Reform* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2017), <https://perma.cc/Z4MH-KDG7>. At four-year institutions, Black students are more than twice as likely to be enrolled in developmental education. U.S. Department of Education, *Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2016), 21, <https://perma.cc/E3J6-8MFH>. For a fuller discussion of how placement testing and developmental coursework inequitably impacts completion rates, see also: Complete College America, *Building on Completion Gains*, 2022; and U.S. Department of Education, *Profile of Undergraduate Students: Attendance, Distance and Remedial Education, Degree Program and Field of Study, Demographics, Financial Aid, Financial Literacy, Employment, and Military Status: 2015–16* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2019), <https://perma.cc/BD9F-LYC3>.
- 37 Phillip Levina and Dubravka Ritter, “The Racial Wealth Gap, Financial Aid, and College Access,” Brookings Institution, September 27, 2022, <https://perma.cc/H8BE-PCFZ>; Museum, Ledesma, and Parker, “Systemic Racism in Higher Education,” 2015; and Ben Erwin and Jennifer Thomsen, *Addressing Inequities in Higher Education* (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2022), <https://perma.cc/FSZ9-RELV>.
- 38 See National Center for Education Statistics, *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups: Indicator 30, Earnings and Employment* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department

- of Education, 2019), <https://perma.cc/U3ZE-2D3T>. See also Rachel Louise Ensign and Shane Shifflett, “College Was Supposed to Close the Wealth Gap for Black Americans. The Opposite Happened,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 7, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/college-was-supposed-to-close-the-wealth-gap-for-black-americans-the-opposite-happened-11628328602>.
- 39 See National Center for Education Statistics, *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*, 2019; and Matt Sigelman and Christopher B. Howard, *Dynamics for Diversity: How Higher Education Can Build a More Equitable Society* (Philadelphia: Burning Glass Institute, 2022), 5, <https://perma.cc/MW48-6VYJ>.
- 40 Caroline Wolf Harlow, *Education and Correctional Populations* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2003), 6, <https://perma.cc/9283-PD8X>. People of color, due to racialized barriers to education in the community, tend to have lower high school diploma/high school equivalency rates when compared to their white peers. Lorelle L. Espinosa, Jonathan M. Turk, Morgan Taylor, et al., *Race and Ethnicity In Higher Education: A Status Report* (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 2019), 27, <https://perma.cc/AP6N-UCJX>.
- 41 Contact with criminal legal authority can begin as early as elementary school. School resource officers, or police officers stationed at public schools, are more common in schools serving communities of color than white communities. Ke Wang, Yongqiu Chen, Jizhi Zhang, et al, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2019* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2020), 199, Table 19.4, <https://perma.cc/5JYE-QH72>. Schools that serve mostly students of color are the most likely to use punitive measures to enforce school rules and perceived safety concerns, and students of color within less segregated schools are the most likely to be subject to punitive measures. See Cresean Hughes, Patricia Y. Warren, Eric A. Stewart, et al., “Racial Threat, Intergroup Contact, and School Punishment,” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 54, no. 5 (2017), 583–616, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313089613\\_Racial\\_Threat\\_Intergroup\\_Contact\\_and\\_School\\_Punishment](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313089613_Racial_Threat_Intergroup_Contact_and_School_Punishment); and Katherine Irwin, Janet Davidson & Amanda Hall-Sanchez, “The Race to Punish in American Schools: Class and Race Predictors of Punitive School-Crime Control,” *Critical Criminology* 21, no. 1 (2013), 47–71, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-012-9171-2>.
- 42 See generally National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Reducing Racial Inequality in Crime and Justice: Science, Practice, And Policy* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2022), <https://perma.cc/SFV9-ZZHF>. For disparities in the criminal legal system related to race, see Mike Wessler, “Updated Charts Provide Insights On Racial Disparities, Correctional Control, Jail Suicides, and More,” Prison Policy Initiative, May 19, 2022, <https://perma.cc/LAU7-CLH2>; NCSL, *Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Criminal Justice System, 2022.*; Hinton, Henderson, and Reed, *An Unjust Burden*, 2018; and Sawyer, “How Race Impacts Who Is Detained Pretrial,” 2019. See also Wagner and Kopf, *The Racial Geography of Mass Incarceration*, 2015.
- 43 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *The Civil Rights Implications of Cash Bail* (Washington, DC: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2022), 3-4, <https://perma.cc/X62E-CF9J>.
- 44 Sawyer, “How Race Impacts Who Is Detained Pretrial,” 2019. For how prosecutorial discretion around charging leads to racial disparities in sentencing, see M. Marit Rehavi and Sonja B. Starr, “Racial Disparity in Federal Criminal Sentences,” *Journal of Political Economy* 122, no. 6 (2014), 1320-1354, <https://perma.cc/U2US-VNA8>. For plea bargaining see Besiki Luka Kutateladze, Nancy R. Andiloro & Brian D. Johnson, “Opening Pandora’s Box: How Does Defendant Race Influence Plea Bargaining?” *Justice Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (2016), 398-426.
- 45 E. Ann Carson, *Prisoners in 2021—Statistical Tables* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2022), 13, table 5, <https://perma.cc/Q98M-FWE9>.
- 46 See for example Daryl A. Vigil, “Classification and Security Threat Group Management,” *Corrections Today* 68, no. 2 (2006), 32-34, <https://perma.cc/8C4V-9T95>.
- 47 Ibid.; and Glenn R. Schmitt, Louis Reedt, and Kevin Blackwell, *Demographic Differences in Sentencing: An Update to the 2012 Booker Report* (Washington, DC: USSC, 2017), 2, <https://perma.cc/GQJ2-RM4N>.
- 48 In the states participating in Vera’s REI Project, PEPs were offered at lower-security level prisons. Medium-level facilities were the highest level of security in which a PEP operated. At least one DOC was considering how it could offer programs at higher security levels. Another location-based consideration is related to recruitment methods. Some DOCs have statewide recruitment for PEPs. This approach allows people to apply to a PEP located anywhere in the state and then transfer to the facility in which it operates if accepted and cleared to live in that facility security level. In other states, recruitment and eligibility is determined at the facility level. This means that only people already incarcerated within facilities where there is a program can enroll. In this system, the location of each PEP is an important factor determining equity in access. Ruth Delaney, Fred Patrick, and Alex Boldin, *Unlocking Potential: Pathways from Prison to Postsecondary Education* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2019), <https://www.vera.org/publications/unlocking-potential-prison-to-postsecondary-education>.

- 49 National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, “Race and Sentencing,” November 23, 2022, <https://perma.cc/WBF4-GNWX>; and Brian D. Johnson, Cassia Spohn, and Anat Kimchi, “Life Lessons: Examining Sources of Racial and Ethnic Disparity In Federal Life without Parole Sentences,” *Criminology* 59, no. 4 (2021), 704-737. Priority for access to limited program participation spaces is frequently based on a number of factors, including risk and needs assessments, conditions of confinement, and the person’s time to release, with those closer to release receiving priority. Laura Gorgol and Brian Sponsler, *Unlocking Potential: Results of a National Survey of Postsecondary Education in State Prisons* (Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2011), 14 and table 3, <https://perma.cc/RMH6-S4NM>. For an example policy, see Washington Department of Corrections, *Policy: Education and Vocational Programs in Prisons*, DOC 500.000, revised September 22, 2023, <https://perma.cc/74GX-YS9H>. See also Chris Burrell and Paul Singer, “Life After Prison: Mass. Leaves Thousands of Prisoners Awaiting Education that Would Help Their Re-Entry,” *WGBH*, June 20, 2023, <https://perma.cc/FJA7-A2S6>.
- 50 DOC and college program leads should think through when and where recruitment begins. If recruitment can begin at intake into prison, DOCs can identify career interests and education and work histories early and use the information to create person-centered education plans that align with available education and career pathways. These plans could then help inform facility placement decisions.
- 51 A 2020 policy and practice scan and survey showed that 33 states imposed restrictions on access to postsecondary education on the basis of in-facility behavioral citations. Leah Bacon, Gina Lee, and Josh Weber, *Laying the Groundwork: How States Can Improve Access to Continued Education for People in the Criminal Justice System* (New York: The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2020), 10, <https://perma.cc/J695-WMU4>.
- 52 See Lucy Lang, *Racial Disparities in the Administration of Discipline in New York State Prisons* (New York: State of New York Offices of the Inspector General, 2022), 3-4, <https://perma.cc/JM6L-J6AZ>; Michael Schwartz, Michael Winerip, and Robert Gebeloff, “The Scourge of Racial Bias in New York State’s Prisons,” *New York Times*, December 3, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/03/nyregion/new-york-state-prisons-inmates-racial-bias.html>; and Katie Michaela Becker, “Race and Prison Discipline: A Study of North Carolina State Prisons,” *North Carolina Central Law Review* 43, no. 2 (2020), 175-225, <https://perma.cc/66KA-AHWT>.
- 53 Leah Wang, “The State Prison Experience: Too Much Drudgery, Not Enough Opportunity,” *Prison Policy Institute*, September 2, 2022, <https://perma.cc/YN7A-BY42>; and Leann Bertsch, Kevin Kempf, Bob Lampert, et al., *Reforming Restrictive Housing: The 2018 ASCA-Liman Nationwide Survey of Time-in-Cell* (New Haven: Yale Law School, 2018), 62, 69, and Figures 9 and 10, <https://perma.cc/ZUY8-D9PV>.
- 54 Delaney, Patrick, and Boldin, *Unlocking Potential*, 2019. A list of colleges in each Second Chance Pell cohort and a list of currently participating colleges can be found at U.S. Department of Education, “Federal Student Aid: An Office of the U.S. Department of Education—Second Chance Pell Experiment,” updated February 23, 2023, <https://perma.cc/U7NM-U954>. Vera works with DOCs in all 50 states and Puerto Rico and the Federal Bureau of Prisons.
- 55 To select partners, Vera weighed several factors, including opportunity for impact as measured by the number of college partners, length of time providing postsecondary education in prisons, and baseline analysis of available demographic data from Vera’s annual self-report survey of SCP colleges. Based on these factors, Vera invited state DOCs in Louisiana, Michigan, Washington, and Oklahoma.
- 56 Initially, four of Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections’ partner colleges—Ashland University, Fletcher Technical Community College, Northshore Technical Community College, and Wiley College—had participated in the project.
- 57 Second Chance Pell college partners included Jackson College, Siena Heights University, Calvin University, and Mott Community College (MI); Connors State College, Tulsa Community College, Langston University (OK); and Tacoma Community College, including its nonprofit partner, Freedom Education Project Puget Sound (FEPPS) and Walla Walla Community College (WA). These colleges are SCP sites that represent the field’s diversity across the types of institutions (such as two-year schools, four-year schools, Hispanic serving institutions, historically Black colleges and universities, private and public), the types of college programs offered to students in DOC facilities (such as academic and CTE programs), and varied locations of programs in each state (maximum, medium, or minimum security; rural or more urban locations).
- 58 Although several tools exist that target equitable practices in higher education, these tools were not created with PEPs in mind. They do not include critical concepts for PEPs, such as the role of DOCs, reentry supports as student services, transferability of credits post-release, or access to programs by security levels. An example of a useful process and tool for colleges to help advance equitable outcomes for students of color is the Equity Scorecard. Although the concepts underlying the tool are useful in higher education, it may require more contextualization for higher education in prison. The tool is also geared toward higher education practitioners and not

- corrections leaders. For more on equity scorecards see: *Confronting Equity Issues On Campus: Implementing the Equity Scorecard in Theory and Practice*, edited by Estela Mara Bensimon and Lindsey Malcom (New York: Routledge, 2012); and Frank Harris III and Estela Mara Bensimon, “The Equity Scorecard: A Collaborative Approach to Assessing and Responding to Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Student Outcomes,” *New Directions for Student Services* 120 (2007), 77-84.
- 59 Modeled after a tool developed by the Community College Resource Center, Vera’s tools present essential practices and prompt respondents to gauge their organization’s adoption stage of each practice. The tools also include questions for respondents to consider that further underscore how each practice connects to equitable access, persistence, and completion in PEPs. Community College Research Center, *Guided Pathways Essential Practices: Scale of Adoption Self-Assessment* (New York: Columbia University, 2017), <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/what-we-know-about-guided-pathways-packet.html>.
  - 60 Different DOC and college program leads reported consulting with prison program coordinators, faculty, financial aid administrators, institutional researchers, diversity office leadership, enrollment and admissions representatives, student advisors, the state higher education office, and reentry administrators.
  - 61 Drawing on common themes and goals identified in the assessment, Vera organized nine virtual learning meetings throughout the project to dive deeper into these themes. The areas of focus included defining REI and organizational culture; faculty and staff inclusion, training, and professional development; embedding guided pathways approaches in PEPs; providing equitable student supports and services; establishing data sharing practices; and centering student voices. These cross-state learning meetings were in addition to the work done within individual states to develop and implement work plans that began to address equity issues that emerged from the assessments.
  - 62 Michigan Department of Corrections, “About,” <https://perma.cc/6ZBX-G6BZ>; Oklahoma Department of Corrections, “Mission, Vision, Values” (Oklahoma City, OK: ODOC, 2022), <https://perma.cc/T63X-7BXV>; and Washington Department of Corrections, “Mission, Strategic Measures & Budgets,” <https://perma.cc/8765-HXUJ>.
  - 63 See for example Jackson College, “Mission Documents,” <https://perma.cc/PCD8-9JU3>; and Tulsa Community College, “Mission,” <https://perma.cc/B2HH-Q82Y>.
  - 64 This is separate from the DEI initiative which resulted in Louisiana discontinuing participation.
  - 65 Julie Nelson and Lisa Brooks, *Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity* (Berkeley, CA: Government Alliance on Race and Equity, 2016), 4-5, <https://perma.cc/S7GX-EXXG>.
  - 66 Leslie Davis and Richard Fry, “College Faculty Have Become More Racially and Ethnically Diverse, but Remain Far Less So than Students,” Pew Research Center, July 31, 2019, <https://perma.cc/RUW7-XLJL>.
  - 67 Ruth Delaney and Chase Montagnet, *Second Chance Pell: A Snapshot of the First Three Years* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2020), 3, <https://perma.cc/8G2H-RB94>.
  - 68 From 1970 to 2010, the United States tripled the number of prisons in the country, with 70 percent of new prison construction located in rural communities—often communities already experiencing concentrated socioeconomic disadvantage. John Eason, “Mapping Prison Proliferation: Region, Rurality, Race and Disadvantage in Prison Placement,” *Social Science Research* 39, no. 6 (2010), 1015-1028.
  - 69 Shaun R. Harper, *Black Male Student Success in Higher Education* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, 2012), <https://perma.cc/TZ63-P9VV>. Inclusive pedagogy refers to the ways that courses, classroom activities, curricula, and assessments consider issues of diversity to engage all students in learning that is meaningful, relevant, and accessible. For more on inclusive pedagogy see University of Chicago, “Inclusive Pedagogy,” <https://inclusivepedagogy.uchicago.edu>. For instance, culturally responsive teaching seeks to empower students educationally and to expand their capabilities in other spheres—including social, emotional, and political arenas—by making students’ own skills, languages, and attitudes meaningful in the classroom. Because not all students learn in the same way, teachers must learn how to best engage with their classes.
  - 70 For evidence-based practices see National Institute of Corrections, “Evidence-Based Practices,” <https://perma.cc/846Q-BTQ3>. For high-impact practices see AAC&U, “Trending Topic | High Impact Practices,” <https://perma.cc/3XNM-B7UJ>.
  - 71 See for example Derek A. Kreager. David R. Schaefer, Martin Bouchard, et al., “Toward a Criminology of Inmate Networks,” *Justice Quarterly* 33, no. 6 (2016), 1000-1028, <https://perma.cc/QP3G-ENRZ>; Derek A. Kreager, Jacob T. N. Young, Dana L. Haynie, et al., “Where ‘Old Heads’ Prevail: Inmate Hierarchy in a Men’s Prison Unit,” *American Sociological Review* 82, no. 4 (2017),

- 685-718, <https://perma.cc/5ZCP-TQKA>; and Dana L. Haynie, Corey Whichard, Derek A. Kreager, et al., “Social Networks and Health in a Prison Unit.” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 59, no. 3 (2018), 318-334, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epdf/10.1177/0022146518790935>.
- 72 Omari S. Simmons, “Lost in Transition: The Implications of Social Capital for Higher Education Access,” *Notre Dame Law Review* 87, no. 1 (2013), 205-252, <https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ndlr/vol87/iss1/4/>; and Scott Jaschik, “White Privilege,” *Inside Higher Ed*, December 5, 2021, <https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2021/12/06/study-shows-ways-white-students-have-advantages-admissions>.
- 73 Targeted recruitment is allowed, so long as the recruitment doesn't have any bearing on actual admissions. U.S. Department of Education, “Questions and Answers Regarding the Supreme Court's Decision in *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. Harvard College and University of North Carolina*” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2023), 3-4, <https://perma.cc/75JT-7A4Z>.
- 74 Stephen Raher, *The Company Store: A Deeper Look at Prison Commissaries* (Northampton, MA: Prison Policy Initiative, 2018), <https://perma.cc/UQJ4-KRDU>; Lauren-Brooke Eisen, *Charging Inmates Perpetuates Mass Incarceration* (New York: Brennan Center for Justice, 2015), <https://perma.cc/52HP-QEC8>.
- 75 ACLU, *Captive Labor: Exploitation of Incarcerated Workers* (New York: ACLU, 2022), 72-75, <https://perma.cc/9SL4-RT58>.
- 76 Federal Student Aid, “What Does Cost of Attendance (COA) Mean?” <https://perma.cc/LA2G-4ZEY>.
- 77 ACLU, *Captive Labor*, 2022, 101-103.
- 78 Prospective students must be in good standing on any current student loan and pay off—or explore options to return to good standing—defaulted student loans taken out before incarceration to be eligible for Pell Grants while in prison. See Allan Wachendorfer and Michael Budke, *Lessons from Second Chance Pell: A Toolkit for Helping Incarcerated Students Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2020), 11, 18-19, <https://www.vera.org/publications/lessons-from-second-chance-pell>.
- 79 Student loan rehabilitation requires a series of communications between the borrower and loan servicers, often complicated by lack of access to information and limited access to telephones and mail and requiring a series of payments to loan servicers in order to regain eligibility for Pell Grants. *Ibid.*, 18-19 and 39-40. For more about the intersection of mass incarceration and student debt, see Deanne Loonin, Amber Saddler, Abby Shafroth, et al., *Collection at All Costs: Examining the Intersection of Mass Incarceration and the Student Debt Crisis* (Washington, DC: Student Borrower Protection Center, 2022), <https://perma.cc/ABS7-DG4J>.
- 80 “If a confined or incarcerated student begins attendance in a payment period or period of enrollment and subsequently withdraws, the school must follow normal R2T4 requirements by performing the R2T4 calculation and returning a portion of the student's Title IV funds if required by the calculation.” U.S. Department of Education, “Prison Education Programs Questions and Answers,” modified June 20, 2023, <https://perma.cc/AY2D-GLDM>. Students can be involuntarily withdrawn from their programs if corrections staff cite them for rule violations or other prohibited behavior. Students can also be transferred midterm to other facilities and lose access to educational programming. Lee Gaines, “Lack of Access, Long Waitlists: Education in Illinois Prisons,” *St. Louis Public Radio*, March 4, 2020, <https://perma.cc/92KN-NTTE>.
- 81 Adam Looney and Nicholas Turner, *Work and Opportunity Before and After Incarceration* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2018), 8, 11-18, <https://perma.cc/YK8D-6CJ3>.
- 82 Hedwig Lee, Tyler McCormick, Margaret T. Hicken, et al., “Racial Inequalities in Connectedness to Imprisoned Individuals in the United States,” *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 12, no. 2 (2015), 269-282.
- 83 Jean M. Kjellstrand, Miriam G. Clark, Irin A. Mannan et al., “Social Support During Incarceration: Predictors of External Social Support for Incarcerated Individuals,” *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 48 (2023), 1183-1203; Travis J. Meyers, Kevin A. Wright, Jacob T. N. Young, et al., “Social Support from Outside the Walls: Examining the Role of Relationship Dynamics among Inmates and Visitors,” *Journal of Criminal Justice* 52 (2017), 57-67, <https://perma.cc/FK6L-BE9R>; and Stephanie Clone & Dana DeHart, “Social Support Networks of Incarcerated Women: Types of Support, Sources of Support, and Implications for Reentry,” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 53, no. 7 (2014), 503-521, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265685481\\_Social\\_Support\\_Networks\\_of\\_Incarcerated\\_Women\\_Types\\_of\\_Support\\_Sources\\_of\\_Support\\_and\\_Implications\\_for\\_Reentry](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265685481_Social_Support_Networks_of_Incarcerated_Women_Types_of_Support_Sources_of_Support_and_Implications_for_Reentry).
- 84 Histories of poverty and eviction can lead to the loss of birth certificates, social security cards, and other crucial identity documents. Similarly, complex family structures and inconsistent tax filings can pose challenges to completing the FAFSA. Stephanie M. Drotos and Sebnem Cilesiz, “Shoes, Dues, and Other Barriers to College Attainment: Perspectives of Students Attending

- High-Poverty, Urban High Schools,” *Education and Urban Society* 48 no. 3 (2016), 221-244, 236; and Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (New York: Broadway Books, 2017), 296-298. Because of the limitations on communication in prison, incarcerated students may need significant support to complete applications for financial aid, including help understanding documentation requirements and gathering all the information needed to successfully apply for aid. Wachendorfer and Budke, *Lessons from Second Chance Pell*, 2020, 16-18.
- 85 Leah Bacon, Gina Lee, and Josh Weber, *Laying the Groundwork: How States Can Improve Access to Continued Education for People in the Criminal Justice System* (New York: The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2020), 3, 18, <https://perma.cc/J695-WMU4>.
- 86 The Community College Resource Center’s Ask, Connect, Inspire, Plan (ACIP) model shows great promise to ensure equitable outcomes. Davis Jenkins and Hana Lahr, *Research Evidence on Community College Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan Onboarding Practices* (New York: Community College Research Center, 2022), <https://perma.cc/9NZJ-HTFK>.
- 87 Jenkins and Lahr, *Research Evidence on Community College Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan Onboarding Practices*, 2022, 6.
- 88 Colleges are moving away from using standardized testing as a method for placement in programs as more and more researchers have documented it as inaccurate and discriminatory. See generally A. Kadlec & M. Dagdar, *Core Principles for Transforming Remediation within a Comprehensive Student Success Strategy: A Statement from the Field* (Colorado: Strong Start to Finish, Education Commission of the States, 2020), 7; Judith Scott-Clayton, “Do High-Stakes Placement Exams Predict College Success?” (New York: Community College Research Center, 2012), <https://perma.cc/ZQ3V-U47R>; Clive Belfield and Peter Crosta, “Predicting Success in College: The Importance of Placement Tests and High School Transcripts” (New York: Community College Research Center, 2012), <https://perma.cc/C9W6-ADFD>; Bickerstaff, Beal, Raufman, et al., *Five Principles for Reforming Developmental Education*, 2022; and Brian Chu, Natasha Rosenblatt, Shelby Cooley, et al., *Inequity by Design: How College Placement Policies Perpetuate Institutional Racism* (Renton, WA: PSCCN, 2021), 11, <https://perma.cc/7GHZ-QMKU>.
- 89 More schools are finding success using multiple measures placement, which bases placement in programs on other factors such as high school coursework completion and grade point average, noncognitive factors (such as positive self-concept, involvement in community service, and participation in nontraditional leadership), and community cultural wealth—the “knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” see Tara J. Yosso, “Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 8, no. 1 (2005), 77, <https://perma.cc/P2AF-QS9Q>. Increasing research posits multiple measures could be a strategy to advance access for Black and Latinx students—who are more likely to be in developmental education—to essential coursework. Multiple measures placement allows for several paths to college-level placement rather than a single path, which could reduce the number of Black and Latinx students with educations bottlenecked by developmental courses. See Federick Ngo and Dan Cullinan, “Multiple Measures Assessment and Placement Promotes Community College Student Success,” MDRC, May 2022, <https://perma.cc/JZT9-YLWT>; Ashley Smith, “Multiple Measures to Predict Success,” *Inside Higher Ed*, September 19, 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/09/20/new-report-encourages-use-multiple-measurements-student-placement>; William E. Sedlacek, “Using Noncognitive Variables in Assessing Readiness for Higher Education,” *Readings on Equal Education* 25, no. 13 (2011), 187-205, <https://perma.cc/5SCZ-5YYH>; and California Community Colleges Assessment and Placement, “Multiple Measures,” <https://perma.cc/5UJU-P39J>.
- 90 Developmental courses in reading, writing, and math have traditionally been offered to remediate learning gaps and prepare students for college-level courses. However, multiple studies have shown that this system hinders academic progress and has disproportionately negative effects for students of color and low-income students. See Helvie, “How to Prevent Worsening Developmental Ed Equity Gaps in a COVID-19 Landscape,” 2020; Bickerstaff, Beal, Raufman, et al., *Five Principles for Reforming Developmental Education*, 2022; and Schak, Metzger, Bass, et al., *Developmental Education*, 2017. Studies suggest colleges have historically systematically underestimated the abilities of students of color; many more would pass college-level courses if granted access. Some students may still need additional support, including targeted tutoring, intensive advising, and corequisite courses. Under the corequisite model, academically unprepared students take entry-level college courses simultaneously with remedial academic support. Raufman, et al., *Five Principles*, 2022, ES-2. At four-year institutions, Black students are more than twice as likely to be enrolled in developmental education. U.S. Department of Education, *Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education*, 2016, 21. Based on these findings, the past decade has seen many states attempt to make reforms via mandate or recommendation to increase equity in education. Russ Hodges, Emily Miller Payne, Michael C. McConnell, et al., “Developmental Education Policy and Reforms: A 50-State Snapshot,” *Journal of Developmental Education* 44, no. 1 (2020), 2-17, <https://perma.cc/93M3-SA5G>.



- 91 Scott-Clayton, "Do High-Stakes Placement Exams Predict College Success?" 2012. Of course, any qualitative measure demands human resources to conduct the assessment, but it also allows students to be placed based on the experience of faculty who will be teaching them, and these faculty members intimately know the standards that these new students will be held to in the classroom. Helvie, "How to Prevent Worsening Developmental Ed Equity Gaps in a COVID-19 Landscape," 2020.
- 92 Hyder, *Accessing Pell Grants for College Programs in Correctional Settings*, 2023, 3.
- 93 National Academic Advising Association, "Concept of Academic Advising," <https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Pillars/Concept.aspx>.
- 94 See for example Virginia Gordon, *Career Advising: An Academic Advisor's Guide* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).
- 95 The CRLA credentialing program was piloted by Clark College, which was not a participant in this project and operated a state-funded college program at facility that is now closed. However, the WA DOC has committed to adapting this program at other locations.
- 96 Incarcerated students are eligible for the Federal Work Study Program. See Federal Student Aid, "(GEN-23-05) Eligibility of Confined or Incarcerated Individuals to Receive Pell Grants," <https://perma.cc/U8NY-5VXU>.
- 97 The Federal TRIO Programs are "outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO includes eight programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to postbaccalaureate programs." U.S. Department of Education, "Federal TRIO Programs - Home Page," <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html>. TRIO, despite its capitalization, is not an acronym. This set of programs was given its name after the first three of the current eight programs were initiated.
- 98 U.S. Department of Education, "Educational Opportunity Centers Program," <https://perma.cc/DT6V-BDLJ>.
- 99 U.S. Department of Education, "Student Support Services Program," <https://perma.cc/V2S5-WU4L>.
- 100 Sara Atske and Andrew Perrin, "Home Broadband Adoption, Computer Ownership Vary by Race, Ethnicity in the U.S.," Pew Research Center, July 16, 2021, <https://perma.cc/2F2H-7YK9>; Ayebea Darko, Danielle Hinton, John Horigan, et al., "Closing the Digital Divide in Black America," McKinsey & Co., January 18, 2023, <https://perma.cc/4QBQ-LWZ8>; and U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Expanding Broadband Access*, <https://perma.cc/TA54-7PW5>.
- 101 Bianca C. Reisdorf and Julia R. DeCook, "Locked Up and Left Out: Formerly Incarcerated People in the Context of Digital Inclusion," *New Media & Society* 24, no. 2 (2022), 478-495, 484.
- 102 Ibid.
- 103 Ess Pokornowski, *Technology in Higher Education in Prison Programs* (New York: Ithaka S+R, 2023), <https://perma.cc/CE9R-GEES>; and Meagan Wilson, Rayane Alamuddin, and Danielle Cooper, *Unbarring Access: A Landscape Review of Postsecondary Education in Prison and Its Pedagogical Supports* (New York: Ithaka S+R, 2019), 29-30, <https://perma.cc/94NR-8LAL>.
- 104 Pokornowski, *Technology in Higher Education in Prison Programs*, 2023, Appendix 8.
- 105 Ashley Finley, *How College Contributes to Workforce Success* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2021), 6-7, 16, <https://perma.cc/9T83-MXJN>.
- 106 JSTOR, "JSTOR Access in Prison Initiative," <https://perma.cc/9X2U-YG69>; and EBSCO, "EBSCO Correctional Ed Service," May 26, 2023, <https://www.ebsco.com/resources/ebsco-correctional-ed-service>.
- 107 Kurtis Tanaka and Danielle Miriam Cooper, *Advancing Technological Equity for Incarcerated College Students: Examining the Opportunities and Risks* (New York: Ithaka S+R, 2020), <https://perma.cc/V86F-SLPN>.
- 108 Throughout Vera's PEP technical assistance beginning in 2012, space constraints have been an often-cited resource limitation for education programming. During the REI Project, multiple focus group participants noted classroom and study space as a PEP limitation, which was confirmed by email. See email from Oklahoma Department of Corrections Superintendent of Schools Jeana Ely to Program Manager Allan Wachendorfer, Vera Institute of Justice, re: "Programmatic space limitations," November 13, 2023, on file at Vera. For evaluating DOC prioritization of programming and use of limited space for educational programming, we look to DOC policy. In Michigan and Oklahoma, the DOCs mandate the provision of educational programming up to the HSD/HSE level, and optionally provide postsecondary educational programming. See Education Programs for Prisoners, 05 Mich. Department of Corrections Policies and Procedures § 02.112, March 1, 2016, <https://perma.cc/KWM4-A4ML>; and Inmate Education Program, 09

Okla. Department of Corrections Policies and Procedures § 02.112, February 7, 2022, <https://perma.cc/S3MW-JBV4>. MDOC divides its programs into those it “shall provide” and those it “may” provide, with postsecondary education in the latter. See Education Programs for Prisoners, 05 Mich. Department of Corrections Policies and Procedures § 02.112. Regarding parole, Michigan law requires a high school diploma or HSE certification for certain sentences under certain conditions. See Education Programs for Prisoners, 05 Mich. Department of Corrections Policies and Procedures § 02.112. Similarly, ODOC only states the “possible” opportunity of postsecondary education. See Inmate Education Program, 09 Okla. Department of Corrections Policies and Procedures § 02.112. On the other hand, WDOC’s policy generally guarantees both. See Education and Vocational Programs in Prisons, 500 Wash. Department of Corrections Policy 000, September 22, 2023.

- 109 Katharine Meyer and Ben Castleman, “Stackable Credentials Can Open Doors to New Career Opportunities,” Brookings Institution, February 2, 2021, <https://perma.cc/C27M-HZCL>.
- 110 Ashley Finley, *How College Contributes to Workforce Success*, 2021; Brandon Busted, “College Degrees Are Both Too Long and Too Short,” *Forbes*, May 26, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brandonbusted/2020/05/26/college-degrees-are-both-too-long-and-too-short/?sh=10cae4c050d9>.
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- 112 34 CFR 668.236(a)(4). See also Hyder, *Accessing Pell Grants for College Programs in Correctional Settings*, 2023, 3.
- 113 CAEL and C-BEN, *Partners in a New Learning Model: Competency-Based Education and Credit for Prior Learning* (Indianapolis, IN: Strada Collaborative, 2021), 3, <https://perma.cc/KSS7-YZQ2>. Rebecca Klein-Collins, *Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success: A 48-Institution Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Adult Student Outcomes* (Indianapolis, IN: Strada Collaborative, 2010), 50-51, <https://perma.cc/RAM2-T8P4>. At this time, CLEP exams are not available on paper. Although at least one DOC nationally has offered access to this exam online, efforts are under way to make these exams available on paper to allow broader access.
- 114 Although Vocational Villages and other vocational programming in Michigan are not affiliated with colleges and are instead operated exclusively by DOC staff, the MI DOC has committed to adapting lessons learned from this project to advance equity in their vocational programming.
- 115 The National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction (NICCC) describes the range of non-criminal legal sanctions that people with a conviction face, either temporary or permanent, across a variety of domains of life. NICCC, “Collateral Consequences Inventory,” database (New York: The Council of State Governments Justice Center), <https://niccc.nationalreentryresource-center.org/>.  
  
People serving a term of community supervision typically must adhere to between 18 and 20 different restrictions each day. See Ronald P. Corbett, Jr., “The Burdens of Leniency: The Changing Face of Probation,” *Minnesota Law Review* 99 (2015), 1697-1732, 1710, <https://perma.cc/VT9E-DPR6>. For a full description of the experience of reentry, see Reuben Jonathan Miller, *Halfway Home: Race, Punishment, and the Afterlife of Mass Incarceration* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2021).
- 116 Hyder, *Accessing Pell Grants for College Programs in Correctional Settings*, 2023, 3.
- 117 See for example California State University, “Project Rebound,” <https://www.calstate.edu/im-pact-of-the-csu/student-success/project-rebound>.
- 118 Measurement can go deeper than breakdowns of student demographics. Racial inequities exist in many aspects of life, such as self-esteem and self-worth, empowerment, pain, identity, stress, and more. Although these are sometimes more challenging to measure, many existing scales and assessments measure dimensions of well-being. There also are research and statistical methods which can be used to develop alternative valid measurements. Despite these challenges, these are aspects of experience that researchers and practitioners frequently measure in settings other than prison and less frequently in prison. For example, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is a self-administered questionnaire used to assess the concept of self-esteem. Morris Rosenberg, *Conceiving the Self* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 153. The Visual Analogue Scale is used in the self-report of physical pain. Anna Maria Carlsson, “Assessment of Chronic Pain. I. Aspects of the Reliability and Validity of the Visual Analogue Scale,” *Pain* 16, no. 1 (1983), 87-101. Even concepts that seem tangible, such as economic status, are multifaceted and have multiple measurement methods. For example, see Carolina Diaz-Bonilla, Sabatino Gonzalez, and Carlos Gerardo, *April 2022 Update to the Multidimensional Poverty Measure: What’s New* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2022), <https://perma.cc/7F5P-EJH7>.

- 119 Identifying sources of disparities and assessing the effect of planned interventions are best performed through an iterative process: (1) assess the current status of racial equity and identify potential sources of disparities; (2) make evidence-informed policy and practice changes that have the potential to advance equity as part of a strategic planning process; (3) evaluate the impact of policy and practice changes through regular assessments and adjust policies and practices; and (4) reevaluate.
- 120 Some PEPs have found workarounds, such as using a specific location code to designate that a student is incarcerated, thus providing an easier avenue for institutional research and other offices to track and manage information on this subgroup of students.
- 121 Offices of institutional research in colleges and universities combine data from a variety of sources within institutions of higher education, including student files and program implementation records, into datasets with formats conducive to evaluation of policies and program goals, compliance reporting, and strategic planning and financial management. However, correctional education units, as part of DOCs, are unlikely to have similar offices populated by professional researchers and data analysts; rather, the functions of institutional research are sometimes performed by a single person or a handful of people who may be responsible for managing data across all levels of education and occasionally data for all correctional programming. DOCs that aspire to enroll all people who are incarcerated in postsecondary education—often amounting to tens of thousands of people in prisons—while promoting accountability for quality and equity will need an increase in resources devoted to data management, tracking, and analysis. Although correctional education sometimes has relatively fewer human resources devoted to the functions of institutional research as compared to institutions of higher education, postsecondary education in prison programs are not always able to make full use of their institutional research departments due to there being no incarcerated student designator, requiring program leads to take on the data work. DOCs are also currently facing a severe, even critical, staffing shortage, which has resulted in additional work for staff as support on other roles. See David Montgomery, “Prison Staff Shortages Take Toll on Guards, Incarcerated People,” *Stateline*, September 26, 2022, <https://perma.cc/4KTS-Y92C>.
- 122 A common example of a knowledge constraint program leads face is attempting to understand whether new student recruitment and enrollment is racially equitable. First, program leads must be able to articulate this question as, “How do the demographics of newly enrolled students in the present financial aid year compare to those of all people eligible to participate?” Second, DOC programming staff must be able to define who was eligible for postsecondary education—academically, programmatically, behaviorally, and possibly due to location—at the start of the last financial aid year—and identify their demographic information—and may face challenges in doing so due to a lack of awareness about eligibility policy and inconvenient data formatting issues, as discussed above. Third, colleges must be able to provide data on demographics of newly enrolled students. Finally, colleges and corrections facilities must use the same categories for race and ethnicity to make a comparison. If these institutions do not collect race/ethnicity data using the same categories, these categories must be brought into alignment using some agreed-upon system. Common examples of how categorization might differ in how each institution records race and ethnicity information are people who are multiracial or who are Hispanic or Latinx. See for example Nancy Rodriguez and Rebecca Tublitz, *Exploring Latino/a Representation in Local Criminal Justice Systems: A Review of Data Collection Practices and Systems-Involvement* (Irving, CA: UCI School of Social Ecology, 2023), 8, <https://perma.cc/8PXE-99JH>.
- 123 These stakeholders should include actors such as leadership and data oversight in correctional education; postsecondary education in prison program leads; institutional research; and possibly representatives from state entities such as State Higher Education Executive Officers Associations, longitudinal data systems, higher education offices, and even community corrections or state departments of labor. These additional members may be included regularly or on an as-needed basis, depending on the goals and outcomes for the Data Working Group.
- 124 Although codebooks vary widely in quality and amount of information given, a typical codebook includes variable names, variable labels, answer labels, and the variable type. Some colleges use the categories that align with the IPEDS through which they are required to report data to the U.S. Department of Education. See National Center for Education Statistics, “IPEDS,” <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>.
- 125 Michael Corso and Lisa Lande, *School Voice Report* (Dunedin, FL: Quaglia Institute for School Voice & Aspirations, 2016), 6, 56, <https://perma.cc/5RLX-6Y98>.
- 126 Washington’s experience in this area presented a learning opportunity for Vera, the other REI Project participants, and the students who volunteered to develop SVCs in the other two states. Vera met with the colleges in Washington to learn about how their SVCs were developed, lessons they learned, and how they have been able to sustain the councils. The REI Project adapted and expanded on the processes used in Washington across the other two states.
- 127 While this had a potential side effect of limiting corrections and college buy-in, Vera and participating sites agreed on this strategy to overcome capacity issues.

- 128 Although colleges selected the initial council members for this project, those that are seeking to replicate this work should lean on whomever has the best sense of the student body. Additionally, during the final meeting, several councils recommended that the initial council write a short essay or be interviewed to better gauge interest and reduce turnover.
- 129 For example, Vera did not have some of the required software to interact with DOC-regulation equipment (such as Polycom). Therefore, alternative arrangements were made to allow students to interact with Vera via Zoom and Microsoft Teams with DOC supervision. Some facilities did not have this capability initially, so on at least one occasion a conference call was made to keep the group development going while DOC administrators figured out the technological issues.
- 130 Bruce W. Tuckman, "Developmental Sequence in Small Groups," *Psychological Bulletin* 63, no. 6 (1965), 384-399, <https://perma.cc/5MB4-Q8A6>.
- 131 Kevin Cokley, Shannon McClain, Alicia Enciso, et al, "An Examination of the Impact of Minority Status Stress and Impostor Feelings on the Mental Health of Diverse Ethnic Minority College Students," *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* 41, no. 2 (2013), 82-95.
- 132 Samantha E. Holquist and Jeff Walls, "'Not Present In Our Ranks': Exploring Equitable Representation in Student Voice Efforts for Policy Change," *Teachers College Record* 123, no. 8 (2021), 3-30.

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Cover image: Graduate Alpha Jalloh walks with his diploma past correction officers congratulating him at the first-ever college graduation ceremony at MacDougall-Walker Correctional Institution, Friday, June 9, 2023, in Suffield, Conn. Credit: AP/Jessica Hill.

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