



Center for Employment Opportunities: Increasing Employment and Reducing Recidivism for Philadelphia's Highest-Risk Formerly Incarcerated Adults

OVERVIEW

Program Basics

- The Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) provides paid transitional employment to individuals who have just been released from prison.
- The program pays participants daily and provides workforce readiness training, job coaching and placement, job retention support, and a variety of other personalized services.

How Does the Center for Employment Opportunities Improve Economic Mobility?

- CEO provides participants with greater income stability and reduces their experience of extreme poverty upon release from prison. Research [demonstrates](#) that income stability is a critical foundation to longer-term upward economic mobility.
- CEO's transitional employment program and job placement services provide participants with work experience and training, allowing them to build skills and position themselves for higher quality employment.
- CEO decreases the likelihood of re-incarceration, which [better positions](#) participants to earn a steady income, complete education or workforce training programs, and access good jobs.

Strength of Evidence

EVIDENCE LEVEL: PROVEN (HIGHEST TIER)

Ranked as having the highest level of evidence by the Department of Labor's CLEAR database.

Target population	Program cost	Implementation locations	Dates active
Formerly incarcerated individuals	\$4,800 per participant	30 locations in 11 states	1970s - present

OUTCOMES & EVIDENCE

- A randomized control trial by MDRC found that CEO reduced rates of recidivism by 22 percent, reduced incarceration for new crimes by 25 percent, and created \$3.30 in social benefit for every \$1 spent on the program.
- A quasi-experimental study completed by the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services found a 19 percent reduction in recidivism, a 52 percent increase in employment rates after 12 months, and a 48 percent increase in employment rates after 36 months.

CEO'S IMPLEMENTATION IN PHILADELPHIA

The Challenge

- Philadelphia had long struggled with high levels of incarceration and recidivism.
- A 2013 report from the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections found that Philadelphia County had the second-highest overall recidivism rate in the state, with 65.5 percent of all individuals released from prison experiencing rearrest or re-incarceration within three years.
- A 2016 report from the Vera Institute of Justice showed that Philadelphia had one of the highest rates of incarceration in the country, with 833 people incarcerated for every 100,000 residents.

The Solution

- Mayor Michael Nutter's administration placed a high priority on reducing recidivism, lowering levels of incarceration, and improving public safety in Philadelphia.
- The GreenLight Fund, a venture philanthropy fund, was in close contact with Pennsylvania state government and the Nutter administration. After spending a year identifying the most effective, evidence-based strategies around re-entry, GreenLight recommends CEO as the optimal partner to bring to Philadelphia.
- CEO had established a long track record of success, starting as an independent organization in New York in 1996 and operating in nine cities by 2015.
- The program reduces criminal behavior and recidivism by offering services that create stability immediately upon return from prison.
- The program consists of four phases: workforce readiness training, transitional employment with daily pay, job coaching and placement, and a year of job retention support.
- Participants work up to four days a week on a CEO work crew, gaining the knowledge, experience, and training to become permanently employed. Once per week, participants attend one-on-one job coaching and development programs.

Major Accomplishments

- Since 2015, CEO has provided services to over 800 Philadelphians recently released from incarceration.
- The program has placed nearly 440 men in permanent, unsubsidized jobs with an average wage of nearly \$12 per hour.
- A 2018 agreement with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services allows for the state to reimburse CEO for up to 50 percent of expenses for anyone receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. This partnership allowed CEO to serve significantly more individuals in Philadelphia and throughout the state and connected CEO participants to vital food and transportation assistance.
- CEO was recognized as a statewide best practice in providing re-entry services by a 2020 report released by the Office of Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf.



CEO'S IMPLEMENTATION IN PHILADELPHIA, CONTINUED

Keys to Success

- The structure, support, and pay that CEO provides to its participants as soon as they are released from prison is at the core of what makes the model effective.
- CEO's ability to serve individuals returning from prison depends on transitional work contracts from government agencies or businesses. In Philadelphia, the City's Department of Parks and Recreation provided support for the program's first two work crews.
- Referrals from the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections and close relationships with individual probation officers ensure that individuals who most benefit from CEO's services are able to enroll.
- Beyond financial support for the initial work crews, the Nutter administration served as a critical convener for CEO, including the organization in a number of citywide initiatives, introducing its leaders to potential partners, and making it part of the broader citywide conversation about incarceration and recidivism.

TIMELINE

MAYOR MICHAEL NUTTER WINS RE-ELECTION

November 2011

Mayor Nutter had long made public safety one of his top priorities, and upon winning a second term, his administration begins a number of new initiatives focused on reducing violence, incarceration, and recidivism.

THE GREENLIGHT FUND APPROACHES PHILADELPHIA AND PENNSYLVANIA STATE GOVERNMENT

August 2015

The GreenLight Fund, led by Matt Joyce in Philadelphia, identifies CEO as being a promising strategy for reducing recidivism. Discussions begin with the city, state, and GreenLight on how to bring the program to Philadelphia. The parties come to an agreement where the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections funds many of CEO's vocational activities, the City of Philadelphia's Department of Parks and Recreation supports the organization's initial social enterprise capacity, and the GreenLight Fund provides time-limited growth capital to launch the program.

CEO LAUNCHES PHILADELPHIA OPERATIONS

August 2015

Participant referrals come from the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. Two work crews are funded by the City of Philadelphia's Department of Parks and Recreation and provide approximately 150 individuals with transitional job opportunities annually.

JACQUELINE WEINBERGER IS HIRED TO LEAD CEO PHILADELPHIA OPERATIONS

December 2016

During this period, CEO deepens its relationships with a range of state and local policymaking and advocacy groups. These partnerships build CEO's ability to understand the local re-entry landscape, provide greater access to services for participants, and advocate for justice reform policies like inclusive hiring.

FIRST NON-CITY SUPPORTED WORK CREW IS ESTABLISHED

January 2018

CEO contracts with CBRE, a real estate company, in the South Philadelphia Navy Yard in its first transitional jobs partnership supported by a business.

CEO PHILADELPHIA ACHIEVES STRONGEST OUTCOMES OF ANY CEO SITE

June 2018

A CEO report finds that in FY2018, CEO's Philadelphia office achieved stronger outcomes than any other CEO location. The program particularly stands out for its results in 180-day employment retention rates.

REIMBURSEMENT AGREEMENT IS REACHED WITH PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

October 2018

Partnership allows for the state's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) program to reimburse partners for up to 50 percent of expenses in providing vocational training services.

CEO LAUNCHES 5TH TRANSITIONAL WORK CREW WITH PHILADELPHIA BUSINESSES

November 2020

The transitional jobs partnership with PolyScience adds to a roster of work crews serving the CBRE Navy Yard, East Falls Community Development Corporation, Green City Works, and Waste Management.

THE PROCESS

Confronting the Problem

- Mayor Michael Nutter enters his second term highly motivated to reduce violence, citywide incarceration levels, and rates of recidivism.
- The Philadelphia GreenLight Fund works with city and state leaders to identify evidence-based programs to reduce recidivism.
- The GreenLight Fund leads negotiations between the city and the state, ultimately striking a deal that combines funding from all three partners.

Designing the Strategy

- The CEO model has been honed since the 1970s, when the organization started as a pilot initiative of the Vera Institute of Justice.
- The strategy is built around the recognition that recently released individuals benefit from immediate and daily pay, a highly structured work environment, individualized support, and a sense of community.
- Before expanding to Philadelphia, CEO had expanded to Upstate New York in 2009, followed by expansions to Tulsa, Oklahoma City, San Diego, and San Bernardino. Given the program's recent growth, the CEO team had a clear sense of the preconditions necessary for successful implementation.

Allocating the Funding

- CEO Philadelphia's first transitional job opportunities are supported by the City's Department of Parks and Recreation, which makes an initial commitment of \$330,000 for two work crews stationed in city parks.
- Nearly half of CEO Philadelphia's funding at launch comes from the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, which contracted with CEO to provide re-entry services. Additional launch funding comes from the GreenLight Fund, the Curaterra Foundation, the Patricia Kind Family Foundation, and Bank of America.
- Since launch, the Pennsylvania Bureau of Community Corrections has provided \$1.7 million in support to CEO through a per diem rate for every participant the program serves.
- In 2018, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, via the SNAP Employment and Training Program, begins to provide a 50 percent reimbursement for services for every participant enrolled in SNAP.

Implementing the Plan

- Once an agreement is reached with the City, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PADOC), and the GreenLight Fund, CEO immediately begins work with PADOC to formalize a referral pathway for individuals well-suited for participation.
- With the help of the Mayor's Office, CEO begins meeting with local leaders and community-based organizations to build relationships and trust.
- Initial round of referrals from PADOC is made and the first 27 individuals begin programming in August 2015.

Measuring & Refining the Approach

- CEO creates a profile for every participant upon entry that contains their demographic basics, previous work experience, food assistance eligibility, and other information.
- As participants engage with programming, CEO Job Coaches work with them to deepen these profiles, defining their skillsets and employment goals. These profiles continue to evolve through individuals' participation and forms the basis of every participant's individualized employment plan.
- Key performance indicators include orientation and work crew attendance, internal assessments of job readiness, number of interviews attended, performance feedback on work sites, placement locations, wages at placements, and retention milestones. These indicators are tracked in every individual's profile.
- The organization has undergone four independent analyses in different locations and demonstrated positive results in each study.



RESOURCES

- [Center for Employment Opportunities website](#)
- [MDRC evaluation of the Center for Employment Opportunities \(NYC site\)](#)
- [Video overview of the CEO program](#)

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