

Promising Practices

Reducing Recidivism Through Prison Entrepreneurship Programs

Prison entrepreneurship programs reduce recidivism and can bolster lifetime earnings for participants, particularly when paired with comprehensive services and mentorship. Texas' [Prison Entrepreneurship Program](#) (PEP) is one of the most widely known prison entrepreneurship programs. It began in 2004 and focuses on mentoring incarcerated men to encourage entrepreneurship and sustainability while providing comprehensive services pre-and-post release.

Participation in PEP begins during incarceration—participants must be within three years of release and have or be pursuing a GED or high school diploma. The application process is extremely competitive, but the program typically focuses on high-risk individuals, with an emphasis on ensuring the program is the right fit. Once accepted, participants begin PEP's three-month leadership program, concentrating on character development

and applying the program's [core values](#). After completing the leadership program, participants are eligible for the hallmark of PEP: the business plan competition, a six-month college-level course serving as a "mini-MBA" and supported by PEP staff and business executives. The curriculum guides each participant through the process of creating a business idea, refining the idea, and producing a corresponding [business plan with a 12-month operating budget](#). Throughout the process, participants receive tailored support from executive volunteers who help refine, research and pitch the business plan. Similar to university-level competitions, participants pitch their business ideas and plans to a panel of judges at various points throughout the process. Graduates receive an entrepreneurship certificate from Baylor University's Hankamer School of Business.



The Importance of Post-Release Reentry Support

Reentry support post-release is critical to the success of PEP. Participants are encouraged to live in one of five PEP transitional homes. A variety of other resources are also provided such as transportation, a support network, regular counseling, emergency financial assistance and access to bus passes, medical services and other needs through partnerships with other organizations. In addition to these services and support, PEP offers a reentry entrepreneurship school (eSchool) that focuses on topics including business strategy, mentorship, accounting and marketing. If a participant completes an additional 16-20 workshops, they can earn a second certificate and become eligible for financial support for their business through relationships held by PEP.



Program Success



Since its inception, over [3,500 individuals](#) have graduated from the PEP program and 100 percent of them were employed within 90 days of release from prison. The program also boasts an overall recidivism rate of just 9 percent, compared to Texas' average of 21.4 percent; and if participants utilize transitional housing and graduate from the eSchool, the recidivism rate drops further, to just 4 percent. PEP graduates have successfully launched over 500 businesses, including a print shop and an online specialty car parts company. According to a [2018 analysis](#), one in four graduates started their own business, and between 2004 to 2018, 57 percent remained open, compared to 53 percent of all businesses in Texas.

PEP is a national model for prison-based entrepreneurship, with an influential impact on a variety of other programs. But what really sets PEP apart from its peer programs is the rigor of its curriculum as well as the comprehensive support provided to participants both during incarceration as well as upon reentry into society.

Do you have a Promising Practice
from your jurisdiction you
want to share?

Contact us at
strategicplanning@ncja.org !