

Principles Underlying a Sound Approach to Reentry Services in the District of Columbia

Project New Opportunity is publishing a statement of Principles underlying a sound approach to reentry in the District of Columbia. These Principles are meant to apply to reentry for individuals being released from the Department of Corrections (DOC). They are not meant to apply to reentry for individuals released back to the District from the federal Bureau of Prisons.

These Principles may serve as reference points for the District of Columbia's government officials and other stakeholders working to improve reentry in the District. Most immediately, we hope these Principles will inform the decision-making going into the design and staffing of the "Portal of Entry," an as-of-yet undefined entity serving individuals released from the DOC.

Principle I. Reentry services and programming should begin for both pre-trial and sentenced inmates at booking and continue throughout incarceration and release to the community.

Principle II. Reentry programming must accommodate the different realities for pretrial inmates, sentenced inmates and other categories of inmates with different length of stays, release mechanisms and conditions of supervision following release.

Principle III. Reentry programs should first serve individuals who most need help to succeed.

Principle IV. Reentry services and programming should be designed, delivered and evaluated according to how well they meet the needs of the individual being served, not the best interest or convenience of program or agency administrators. Reentry services and programs should be supportive advocates for the returning citizen.

Principle V. An inmate's participation and achievements in reentry activities should be voluntary, but participation may wisely be incentivized with privileges or rewards.

Principle VI. Returning citizens benefit from, and should have counsel, advice and support from formerly incarcerated individuals who have succeeded in their own reentry. At the same time, reentry programming should avoid stigmatizing returning citizen by consigning them to facilities and services that are unnecessarily identified for the use of "offenders."

Principle VII. The health and viability of the community to which formerly incarcerated individuals return is an important factor in successful reentry.

Principle VIII. Government must provide adequate public funding for the array of reentry services required to meet the most significant of returning citizen's varied needs.

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***About these Principles:** Based on observations in several jurisdictions, Project New Opportunity's staff perceived a need among policymakers, program designers and those responsible for funding reentry programs for a shared understanding and vision of the function and role of reentry programming and services. To meet this need, as an aid to our own work, and with the advice of experienced partners, PNO is developing a set of Principles useful across jurisdictions. As a first step, PNO is developing Principles that, while particularly suited to the District of Columbia, may be a useful template for other jurisdictions.*