



An Evaluation and Sustainability Resource Brief

Process Evaluation Question Bank

For Data Collection With Reentry Program Staff and Stakeholders

Process evaluations serve several critical functions; among them are documenting what [the program model](#) is, how program activities are being implemented, and what helps and hinders successful implementation. This information—mostly captured qualitatively—helps guide midcourse corrections, inform interpretation of outcome findings, and identify lessons learned for future implementations. Reentry program staff and stakeholders are rich sources of such information.

This resource compiles interview topics and question items adapted from prior studies. It can be used by researchers who plan to collect data from staff and stakeholders as part of their reentry program evaluation. Question examples in this resource can be adapted to be used in unstructured or semistructured interview guides, focus group guides, and site visit protocols. The questions can be modified to fit local context and programming.

General Considerations

- To skip to a certain topic (domain) in this document, click on the hyperlinked title in the nearby table.
- Not all questions will be appropriate for all interviewees; appropriateness will depend on role and what unique information the person in that role can provide. For example, a case manager might not be able to answer questions on sustainability planning, which are more appropriate for program administrators.
 - Potential interviewees might include reentry program directors, case managers, treatment providers, parole officers, and group facilitators. Potential stakeholders might include department of corrections and court administrators, advocacy groups, and faith leaders.
- Some questions may depend on the timing of the interview relative to program implementation. For example, if the evaluator is interviewing program directors 3 years into implementation, questions about sustainability may elicit more information than they would if they were asked in the first few months.

Process Evaluation Question Bank

- Many of the example questions give several wording options, depending on the project’s specific focus and researcher interest. For example, “Have any (social/community/economic) factors influenced the program’s (design/operation/implementation)?”
- If you are planning to collect data at multiple time points (for example, end of year 1 and end of year 3), consider asking what has changed since the last data collection. For example:
 - “Since the last time we spoke/Since our site visit, have there been any changes with...?”
 - “In the past 2 years, has the project implemented any changes related to...?”

Domain	Purpose of Domain Questions
Interviewee Background and Program Affiliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand role and background/qualifications • Situate interviewee’s knowledge within a larger context of experience
Program Development and Reentry Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document how the program came to be (in terms of funding, collaboration, and resources) • Connect program to local community context and criminal legal system policies • Understand program location and partnering agencies
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document staffing infrastructure, hierarchy, and decision making • Describe how the program is staffed (roles, expertise, and training) • Understand staff turnover and retention and whether and how these factors have affected the work
Interagency Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify partnering agencies and how they work together
Target Population, Recruitment, and Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specify the target population for different program components; document eligibility criteria • Understand how eligible participants learn about and are recruited into the program • Determine whether program participants are members of the target population • Understand why people decline participation or drop out, and what factors help keep participants engaged
Screening and Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document whether and how reentry program participants are screened or assessed, when and by whom tools are administered, and how the information is used • Determine whether specific assessment tools are used and how they were chosen • Ascertain the ways in which the tools are helpful and what their limitations are

(continued)

Process Evaluation Question Bank

Domain	Purpose of Domain Questions
Project Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Case Management• Programming, Treatment, and Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe the program model and the different activities involved, including how long participants are engaged in each component• Document key approaches and components• Learn whether specific curricula or evidence-based or promising practices are used and what they are• Document program fidelity and reasons for program adaptations• Verify program requirements for successful completion
Implementation Challenges, Facilitators, and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uncover factors that have made implementation difficult or been barriers to successfully running key components of the reentry program• Understand what made implementation easier, helped move the program forward, or enabled partnerships or successful implementation• Document help and technical assistance that was provided and the ways in which it was helpful
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn about plans for the short- and long-term sustainability of the program
Lessons Learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe what implementers have learned that could help future reentry programs avoid early pitfalls or put systems in place to ensure success



Interviewee Background and Program Affiliation

- How are you involved with [reentry program name]? What organization are you affiliated with, and what is your title and role there?
- How long have you been working with [reentry program name]?
- Qualifications
 - Do you have any formal education, licensing, or certifications that are helpful or necessary for your role? If so, what are they?
 - Do you have lived experience with jails or prisons, or being in recovery? If you are comfortable sharing, can you talk about how that has helped you perform your work?
 - Do you have prior experience working with populations involved with the criminal legal system? If so, can you tell me a little bit about it? *[Tailor to program—gender-specific, focus on substance use disorder, etc.]*

Process Evaluation Question Bank



Program Development and Reentry Context

[These questions are more appropriate for program directors and agency heads]

- What agencies were involved in the program planning/design process?
 - How were these relationships developed?
 - How did the different agencies make decisions together?
 - Were there any agencies not at the table that would have been helpful to have?
- Have there been any factors (social/community/economic) that influenced the program's design/operation/implementation? If so, how did they affect your program?
- What key changes, if any, were made to the program after its start (i.e., in the first 2 years of program operations)? Why were these necessary?
- In what ways has your program involved individuals with lived experiences in designing or guiding program development and implementation?
- Policies
 - In what ways, if any, was your program's initial design/development influenced by state or local reentry policies? Human services policies (housing, treatment, employment, etc.)?
 - Have there been any reentry/human services policy changes that have affected your program? How?
 - Are there any pending reentry or human services policy changes that will affect your program?



Staffing

- How is [reentry program or specific program component] staffed?
 - How many part-time and full-time staff are involved?
 - What are the different roles that are required to implement the program?
 - What do you see as the most important qualifications for each role?
- How much importance is placed on whether program staffing reflects the diversity of the reentry population?
 - If important, what efforts are made to reflect this diversity? What have been some of the challenges?
- What has been challenging about hiring for this program? Has there been any turnover? What are some of the issues that have been driving turnover? What have you found helps retain staff and keep them engaged with the work?
 - Have staffing issues affected the initiative? If so, in what ways?
- To what extent has the program intentionally hired individuals with lived experiences as professional or paraprofessionals to assist in the reentry process? In what ways has doing so added to your programming? Have additional supports been needed for these staff members?

Process Evaluation Question Bank

- What types of training are offered to/required of the different roles?
[Probe on how to engage with participants, communication, use of authority, incentives and sanctions, problem-solving, cultural competency, etc.]
 - How often do these trainings occur?
 - Who leads the trainings?
- How are the various roles supervised, and what is the feedback structure?
- Does the reentry program have specific policies and procedures for how staff should interact with program participants? If so, how are those conveyed to new staff?



Interagency Collaboration

[Some of these questions may be more appropriate for the head of the agency who has ultimate responsibility for the reentry program overall]

- What agencies are currently involved in the reentry programming? What are their unique roles?
- Has there been agency turnover? If so, why? How has that affected the program?
- How do the different agencies make decisions together?
- Policy-level collaboration:
 - Are the right stakeholders involved in reentry efforts? Who is missing, and why? What would be needed to get them on board?
 - Do the various agencies have a shared vision for reentry? Where are the places where there are differences?
 - Is there a shared commitment to work toward the vision and goals of reentry?
 - Is an effective leader in place to guide your efforts?
- Case-level collaboration:
 - How does your program collaborate with respect to meeting individual client needs (e.g., does the approach include case management teams, such as a group of professionals who are involved in the day-to-day care of participants)? How often do different agencies meet about participants, and what information do they share?



Target Population, Recruitment, and Retention

- What groups or individuals was the program designed to serve?
 - How do these groups vary by program component?
 - Has this changed over time? If so, in what ways, and why?
- What requirements must people meet to be eligible for the reentry program? Requirements could be related to experiences, demographics like age/race/gender, geographic location, charges, etc.
 - In what ways do requirements vary by program component?
 - Have requirements changed over time? If so, why?
- How do eligible participants learn about the program?
 - How do you reach out to people and invite them to attend?
 - Are there program participants who are not members of the target population? How did they get involved?

Process Evaluation Question Bank

- Are there certain eligible groups that you have found hard to enroll? What makes them more difficult to reach, or why have they declined participation?
- What have been some of the challenges to recruitment?
- About what percentage of people who start the program successfully complete it?
 - What factors help keep participants engaged?
 - For those who drop out before completion, why do they leave the program?



Screening and Assessment

- Does your program implement any screening or assessment tools?
 - If yes, are the tools ones that your agency developed, or ones that have been used by other programs?
 - If a tool was developed specifically for your program, what was the process of developing it? If you used an existing tool, what is its name, how was it chosen, and have you made any adaptations?
 - When is each tool initially administered to a program participant (e.g., pre-release, transition, post-release)? Does it get repeated at any point?
 - What does it screen for or assess? (e.g., substance use, risks, needs, strengths)
 - How does your agency ensure that the tools are administered correctly? What training or quality assurance (QA)/quality control (QC) processes have been put in place to ensure fidelity?
 - Where do you store the data from these screeners and assessments, and who can access that data?
- What training has been given to staff performing assessments, and by whom?
- How do the assessment results inform a reentry participant's time in the program?
 - Case management service and treatment
 - Supervision case planning
 - Length of time in program/intensity of services/graduation requirements
- In what ways have the tools been helpful? In what ways are they limited? Harmful?
- What have been some of the challenges related to screening and assessment thus far?



Activities: Case Management

[These questions are intended for case managers and program probation/parole officers]

[NOTE: Clarify which phase the interviewee is describing—pre-release, transition, post-release, or some combination of the three.]

- Are individualized case plans developed? When and by whom?
 - What information typically is included in the case plans? Do case plans address participants' risks and needs at each stage (intake and incarceration phase, pre-release/transition planning phase, and reentry and post-supervision phase)?
 - Are case plans updated to reflect changes in participants' risks and needs, and to document improvement and progress made? When, by whom, and how often?
 - Who has input to case planning (e.g., service providers, participants, family members)?
 - Who routinely gets a copy of the case plans?

Process Evaluation Question Bank

- To what extent is a team approach used for case management? What information do program/service partners share?
 - Do case-level collaborative efforts occur at the institutional phase? Transition phase? Community phase? Who is involved, and can you walk me through how it works?
 - If there is a team approach at the transition phase, does the case management team include appropriate stakeholders from both the institution *and* the community who have, or will have, regular contact with participants?
 - Do facilitators/providers/POs formally meet as a team to develop collaborative case plans? Does the participant attend?
 - Do facilitators/providers/POs formally and routinely meet to discuss the participant's progress, as well as potential modifications to case management plans? Does the participant attend?
 - Do facilitators/providers informally share information with one another verbally about participants? (e.g., performance in the work setting, housing unit, or treatment group; stressors that arise that are or could be problematic for participants, such as family circumstances or conflicts with others in detention)
 - Who has access to participants' *historical* records? (e.g., conviction history, social history, prior institutional/supervision performance)
 - Who has access to participants' *current* records? (e.g., risks/needs and other assessment data, case plan, treatment progress summary, job performance assessment, institutional conduct record, release plan)
 - Is there any form of integrated record keeping pertaining to individual cases and progress in the program?
- What communication techniques are used to engage participants?
 - Is motivational interviewing used? If so, what training in it was provided to staff?
 - Are case plans actively referred to during most sessions with participants?
 - Do participants receive feedback on their progress addressing their risks/needs? How and when does this occur?
 - Are incentives used to encourage progress? Which incentives, and under what circumstances? (e.g., praise, public recognition)
 - Are sanctions or other consequences used to address noncompliance? Which sanctions, and under what circumstances?
- In what ways, if any, are family members engaged in a loved one's case?
 - How are they engaged?
 - What has been challenging about family engagement?
 - How have you seen family engagement help participants meet their goals?
- How are case management activities tracked?
 - Is there a database? Case management system? Who has access to it?
 - What information is tracked?
 - How is confidentiality of data ensured?
 - How is the data used? Whom is it shared with?

Process Evaluation Question Bank



Activities: Programming, Treatment, and Services

[Most of these questions are for facilitators and treatment and service providers]

- What treatment services do you provide to reentry program participants? At what stage (e.g., pre-release, transition, or post-release) does each of these happen?
- For each service:
 - What are the topics it is addressing, or what skills is it focusing on developing?
 - Is a set curriculum involved?
 - What would you say are the essential elements of the curriculum that are critical to implement with fidelity?
 - To what extent do you adhere to program substance, including coverage of all sessions in the intended order and use of trainer and participant manuals/materials and skills building exercises (e.g., role playing)? What adaptations have been made and why?
 - Do you augment the curriculum with other material? If so, what do you do, and how was that approach chosen?
 - Do you know whether the program is considered “evidence based”?
 - How does your agency ensure that the interventions are implemented correctly?
 - What training or QA/QC processes have been put in place to ensure fidelity?
 - What are the goals, and how is success defined?
 - How much of the activity do you think a participant needs to receive to meet the goals? This could be number of hours of engagement over a certain length of time, like 3 hours a week for 6 months.
 - Is the activity administered one-on-one or in a group? If in a group, about how many participants are in each group? How many facilitators?
 - In your opinion, in what ways is the treatment culturally appropriate? In what ways is it not? How about gender responsive?
 - Who is assigned to participate, and how is that assignment made?
 - What factors or characteristics do the participants have in common?
 - How have participants reacted to the program?
 - Can you give some examples of participant successes?
 - What happens if individuals do not complete the full intervention?
 - What have been some of the challenges or barriers participants face that affect their success?
- Do staff use incentives and consequences in response to progress or noncompliance?
 - What incentives (e.g., praise, public recognition, small tokens), and under what circumstances?
 - What consequences, and under what circumstances?
 - In general, how extensively are incentives and sanctions used? Which are used more often and why?
- What types of data are tracked for program participants in this service?
 - Is there a database? Case management system? Who has access to it?
 - What information is tracked?
 - How is confidentiality of data ensured?
 - How is the data used? Whom is it shared with?

Process Evaluation Question Bank



Implementation Challenges, Facilitators, and Support

- What has worked well with the project? What has not worked so well with the project?
- What additional challenges have you faced in implementing your [reentry program or specific activity]? How have these challenges affected your program?
 - Some examples of challenges could be lack of support from local policymakers, lack of resources, or the inability to share data between partner agencies. Did any of these present challenges for you?
- In what ways, if any, has the political climate/leadership—or changes in them—affected your program?
- Is there a technical assistance provider for your work?
 - If so, what types of assistance have you requested, if any? (e.g., training materials, facilitation)
 - What has the response been to your requests? (e.g., responsiveness, timeliness, helpfulness)
 - What types of assistance might you ask for in the future?
 - What assistance has the provider offered without your requesting it? Was it helpful? Why or why not?
- What additional supports or resources could be beneficial, if any?
- What are you hoping to see the project accomplish within the next year?



Sustainability

[These questions are more appropriate for program directors and agency heads]

- Has there been any discussion about sustainability and how your reentry program expenses will be covered after the grant ends?
- Who has been involved in those discussions?
- What are your plans for sustainability past your current grant funding?
 - What parts of the reentry program do you think are sustainable without additional funding? Are they likely to be continued?
 - What parts are not sustainable or will likely go away?
- What efforts are under way to sustain the program?
 - Have you been looking for funding elsewhere to support the program? If so, where?
 - Has there been any joint fundraising with program partners?
 - Have there been other efforts to cut costs, such as resource sharing or co-locating staff?
 - Are changes to the program being contemplated for after funding ends? What are those changes, and how were they identified?
- What do you see as the legacy of your reentry program in your organization and the larger community?
- *[For those not in an administrator role]* Has anyone discussed with you what is likely to happen as the program nears the end of its funding period? If so, what information was conveyed?

Process Evaluation Question Bank



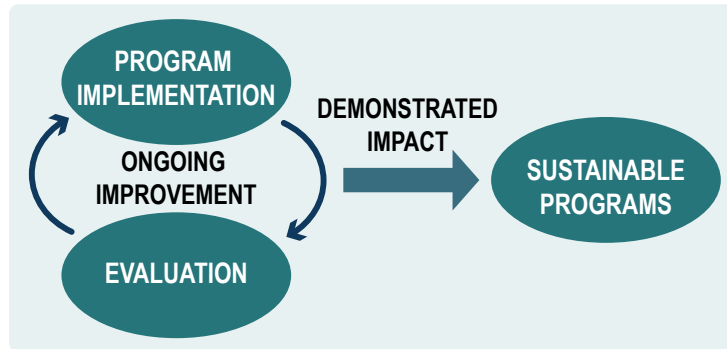
Lessons Learned

- If colleagues in another jurisdiction wanted to implement a reentry program in their community, what would you want them to know as they start?
 - What do you wish you had known ahead of time that would have made design and implementation go more smoothly?
 - What have you learned about designing and implementing this reentry program that you think it's important to highlight for policymakers?
 - What are the most important recommendations based on your experiences in this program that you would make to the reentry council or other key leadership in your local context?
 - What are the most important recommendations you would make to the reentry field based on your experiences in this program?
 - What have you learned over time that seems particularly important to program or individual participant successes?
 - Are there things you have come to regard as undermining the success of the program? Its staff? Its participants?
 - What, if anything, would you recommend doing differently based on the benefit of hindsight?
 - Are there any unique or innovative features of this program that other jurisdictions might be interested in learning about?
 - In general, what do you see as the program successes to date...
 - At the individual-client level (e.g., better outcomes)?
 - At the partnership level (e.g., improved collaboration, increased information sharing)?
 - At the system level (e.g., legislative changes, policy changes)?
-

Process Evaluation Question Bank

The Evaluation and Sustainability Training and Technical Assistance Project

The Evaluation and Sustainability Training and Technical Assistance (ES TTA) Project supports Second Chance Act (SCA) grantees in conducting more rigorous evaluations that lead to data-driven program improvement and demonstrated impact and that support programs' long-term sustainability. For more information about the project, contact ESTTA@rti.org.



The ES TTA Project is conducted by RTI

International and the Center for Justice Innovation with funding from Grant No. 2019-MU-BX-K041 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.



Suggested citation: Swaner, R., Zablocka, R., & McKay, T. (2023). *Process Evaluation Question Bank*. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance.