

Building Effective Corrections Partnerships for Community-Based Reentry Organizations

Community-based organizations (CBOs) working with people in reentry can struggle to establish strong partnerships with their state and local corrections agencies. This tip sheet is intended to support reentry-based CBOs to build and sustain effective relationships with their corrections partners.

Why Are Relationships With Corrections Partners So Important?

- Corrections agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs) **need each other to succeed**.
 - **Success** is meeting program goals and objectives, delivering services effectively and efficiently, and improving outcomes for returning individuals, their families, and communities.
- **Systemic change** (i.e., efforts to “ban the box,” responding to technical rule violations with approaches that do not involve reincarceration, restoration of healthcare benefits upon release) cannot happen when either stakeholder is not **actively engaged** in the work.
- Strong partnerships:
 - help CBOs **overcome unforeseen challenges** (e.g., pre-release access during pandemic),
 - improve chances for program **sustainability** when grant cycles end,
 - open opportunities for collaboration on **future funding opportunities**, and
 - are **nimble** and **can adapt** to emerging challenges.

Key Ingredients of Effective Relationships With Corrections Partners

- Finding **common ground**: True collaboration involves having shared goals (although ways of getting there can vary).
- **Trust** and **respect**: Strong coalitions demonstrate equal voice and power and allow honest conversations.
- Avoiding **preconceived notions** about the other partner that may shape the way your relationship develops.

It's a relationship: Invest the time, understand each other's struggles, learn the non-negotiables, and find opportunities to celebrate wins.

Starting a new partnership?

- **CBOs** should:
 - demonstrate your knowledge of evidence-based practices,
 - demonstrate your commitment to sustainability (after funding ends),
 - demonstrate your ability to maintain proper boundaries with program participants, and
 - appreciate corrections partners' priorities (e.g., safety and security) and policies.

- Corrections agencies should:
 - understand the resource limitations also faced by CBOs,
 - appreciate the importance of pre-release engagement between CBOs and participants,
 - value the ability of CBOs to identify and mobilize other community partners, and
 - make clear and support CBOs in meeting data and reporting needs for your agency.

Strengthening an existing partnership?

Remember:

- Every relationship needs **nourishment**.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate.
- Give **positive feedback** and tackle challenges together.
- Do things **with** each other instead of to each other or for each other.
 - In Denver, Colorado, Mile High Behavioral Healthcare invites Denver Adult Probation to cofacilitate community groups with their treatment team, and use their office for client check-ins. This nontraditional approach allows clients to feel more supported by their team and strengthens relationships between Mile High and Probation staff.
- Celebrate successes and enjoy your work together!
- Work to achieve **true collaboration**, rather than just settling for cooperation or coordination toward a common outcome.
- Involve individuals who are returning from incarceration and their families as partners.

“Effective change requires trust and a common goal.”

—John P. Kotter



For more information, please
contact

Simon Gonsoulin •
sgonsoulin@air.org

Michelle Perry • mperry@air.org

or visit us at: <https://www.air.org>

