

Derrick Franke:

Hello everyone and welcome to Reentry Week 2021. My name is Derrick Franke and this webinar today is titled, Engaging Communities to Create Sustained Change in Reentry. Before we get started, a disclaimer here. The following presentation was prepared under a cooperative agreement from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, BJA, Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the US Department of Justice. Again, my name is Derrick Franke. I am a TA coach with the American Institutes for Research. We also have two experts with us today in the world of reentry, Lena Hackett from Community Solutions, Inc., and Saad Soliman from JustLeadershipUSA.

Derrick Franke:

When you think about the word reentry, what comes to mind? Is it people, is it relationships, communities, families, systems? Is it programs, strategies, a second chance? Is it hope? We know, of course, that all of these ingredients can lead to success in reentry. We also know that programs come and go and people come and go, so does funding. Administrations and priorities change. But the one constant in our work is our hope to create a meaningful sustained change, to improve the lives of men and women returning from incarceration, to strengthen communities and families and even to transform systems. So thank you again for joining us today. The focus of our webinar here is how we get there. So our two experts based on decades of experience in the world of reentry will craft for us a recipe for arranging these ingredients in a way that gives us our best chance to create sustained change.

Derrick Franke:

We'll focus on three crucial ingredients. Lena Hackett will talk with us about the importance of building strong coalitions. What does a coalition mean, who should be in yours, and how do you build an effective one? She'll then transition to talk about the importance of including and engaging community members and community institutions in the reentry process. And finally, Saad Soliman will talk about tying all of these ideas together in how do we harness the momentum we create to sustain that change? In the end, our hope is that you can take this recipe, make it your own and create that sustained change we all want to see.

Derrick Franke:

And remember, in the words of Margaret Mead, to never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. We believe that when it comes to reentry, this thoughtful, committed group of citizens should include a range of voices. From practitioners who work in the system to citizens who have been impacted by that system, to community members, families, civic leaders, and organizations ready to support their successful return. I'll hand things over now to Lena Hackett to talk about our first key ingredient, coalition building.

Lena Hackett:

Thank you, Derrick. I appreciate that introduction and certainly your overview of what we're hoping to accomplish with this webinar today. I think we all know that the thing that makes systems sustainable and make systems change is not funding, it's people. It's people who operate programs, who set up policies and who are affected by these systems. So what I want to start to talk about is how we bring those people together in a really meaningful way. So we're going to start talking about coalition building.

Lena Hackett:

So, I believe that words are very important when we're talking about what a coalition is, because it can be a generic word that people use to mean a lot of different things. What we mean when we say coalition is that this is a word that suggests that we want to talk about something different than what we've usually done. So it is an alliance, it's a coming together to move to action. A coalition is not normally something where you're just getting information. Coalition is an active word. So it's a group of people who come together for a common cause to move into combined action.

Lena Hackett:

It comes from this root word of coalesce. When we think about coalesce, it means to grow together, to unite into a whole and to unite for a common purpose. So what we're talking about is lots of individuals, lots of individual organizations really morphing together, all for a common goal.

Lena Hackett:

And again, names are really important because I think all of us on this webinar have been in groups of people before, and we will call them different things. And unless we know exactly what everybody thinks when we say that, we don't know what we're all there for. So what we hear most often is you're either on a steering committee or you have a task force, and these are words that are groups of people coming together. With this, some really primary difference is in that steering committees are usually about managing the operations of something, and it's something often that is temporary, and task forces are really very temporary. A task force comes together, solves a problem and they disperse. So this is the difference that we want to talk about in terms of coalitions and other groups of people that come together.

Lena Hackett:

I'm going to talk about this in the context of a fairly robust and long running coalition, the Marion County Reentry Coalition. Marion County is in Indianapolis, Indiana. I think it's best understood how a coalition operates if we can do this through this example. The Marion County Reentry Coalition has been around since 2009. So they've had a lot of opportunity to test what works, what doesn't work, and really to become quite mature.

Lena Hackett:

One of the definitions that we've used for "coalesce", is about people coming together. People are going to come together to achieve a common result. So that's very important in terms of establishing your coalition in that you want to have a common targeted result. The Marion County Reentry Coalition has a common result of all adults in Marion County involved in the justice system are successfully integrated into their community. And this is a result statement. People will often think of a results statement as a mission statement, but a mission statement is a lot different. A mission statement is usually focused on what an organization is going to do. What type of work are they going to do. With the result statement, we're saying what's going to be achieved.

Lena Hackett:

What's going to happen for the people who are served? And in this case, adults. Where are those people residing at? And in this case, Marion County, Indianapolis. What this does is really set the stake in the sand for what the non-negotiables are in terms of the work of this organization. The work of this

organization is about these people in this community who are impacted in this system. For the Marion County Reentry Coalition, they have another specialized population. So it's all adults in Marion County, and knowing that there is a disproportionate impact across the system, they have a priority focus on disproportionate impact on people of color.

Lena Hackett:

To have a coalition. You can't just become a coalition and decide you're going to be a coalition unless there are others that recognize that that coalition is important and needs to exist. So, we call this an authorizing body. The authorizing body is the entity in the community that has probably initially identified that this issue that the coalition is going to address is an issue for the population as a whole. So this establishes the result as a priority, and it establishes the coalition as the body that's going to address this.

Lena Hackett:

In many times, this can be a governor's office, it can be a mayor's office, it can be the United Way, it could be the department of correction. The authorizing body is the entity that's responsible for the population that you're looking at. They publicly authorize the work. Their other role is as the coalition is moving forward, if there are barriers to success, you go back to your authorizing body and say, "Here are the things that need to be addressed beyond what the coalition can do." As the authorizing body, their job is really to remove those barriers. And again, then the coalition is responsible to this authorizing body in terms of making sure they're fully aware of the work of the coalition, the progress that is being made and the results that are being achieved.

Lena Hackett:

Another key is that there is a sense of urgency. For a coalition to form and to be active, it's not easy work. So coalitions are about accomplishing something for a population that needs to be done soon because this population is being impacted every day that progress is not being made. So when we talk about a coalition, we're not talking about a group of people that comes together, thinks about what kind of plan should be in place, maybe does a strategic plan and hands it off to someone to think about what's going to be done over the next three to five years. With this coalition, we're talking about urgency. So every time this coalition is together, they talk about what could be done in the next 30 days. How are we going to be moving this forward? What action are we going to be taking and in what immediacy?

Lena Hackett:

I think most importantly, this coalition is not dependent on funding. I know many of the folks on this webinar have been recipients of federal funds that have really allowed you to do quite phenomenal things in your communities. Where coalitions come together is that type of funding helps move the work forward but the work of the coalition is not dependent on it. Many times, if you are waiting for funding to come, you are frozen and you cannot move forward. Coalitions do not wait for funding to come to them. Coalitions come together and leverage the energies, the services, the tools, the resources of the members of the coalition.

Lena Hackett:

So what coalitions are about is finding funding to help move things forward is a benefit but it's not what makes them powerful. What makes them powerful is their coming together and working together. So

many times, the things that they do have no cost at all or very low cost because what we're looking for is for them to redesign how they operate their systems. If you think about it in terms of what we're asking members of the coalition is to get up on the balcony and look down on the dance floor and figure out what's happening in this population that's on the dance floor and changing the way that dance happens.

Lena Hackett:

It's also important in a coalition to know if what you're doing matters. Is the work of the coalition actually moving towards any kind of result? Again, looking at the work of the Marion County Reentry Coalition, they determined that their indicators of success, of whether they were helping people be successful when they reentered the community, was really re-arrest and return to incarceration. We know that there are lots of strategies that happen that impact whether someone is re-arrested and whether they return to incarceration. With a coalition, you cannot measure everything. So what you want to do is measure the primary indicators. For the Marion County Reentry Coalition, and probably for most folks whose coalition would be focused on reentry, keeping someone from being re-arrested or from being re-incarcerated. If those two things happen, you can assume that all of your strategies are moving you in the right direction.

Lena Hackett:

For the Marion County Reentry Coalition, they measure re-arrest at six months and 12 months, and they measure return to incarceration at six months and 12 months. The first number you see here, six month re-arrest rate, when the coalition started doing their work in 2009, that re-arrest rate was 20.4%. Because of the work of the coalition over the years, that rearrest rate is now down to 9.3%. So some significant progress, simply through the work of this coalition coming together. You can see similar progress with the 12 month re-arrest rate. And then on the bottom here, you can see also similar progress with six months return to incarceration and 12 month return to incarceration. What we're looking for with a coalition is not performance measures. We're looking for, what do you want for the population as a whole? So, what we want is for those numbers to be zero. And so the work of the coalition is constant as they work to achieve that.

Lena Hackett:

This graph, which I know is really tiny and very hard to see, is just a graphical way, a picture of the data that you just saw. When the coalition gets together, they should always look at their data. And in the case of the Marion County Reentry Coalition, these are indicators they look at consistently because if this data is not going in the right direction, then the coalition knows they need to do their work differently.

Lena Hackett:

Who's in this coalition? We've talked about the result. The common result that's important so that everybody you put in the room knows what this common result is, they're committed to it and that's what they're in that room to do. They know what data they want that would measure progress towards that data and they know how to get that data and they have it measured in front of them every day and they know the story behind that data. Data in and of itself is very powerful. Knowing why your data is moving in a certain direction certainly will impact what kind of strategies you put forward.

Lena Hackett:

As an example of that, as you can see here on the right-hand side, the data for the Marion County Reentry Coalition took a dramatic drop in 2020. The reentry coalition could have said, "Wow, our strategies are really important, really powerful. Look at the impact we've made." But we all know that 2020 was a very odd year and the impact of COVID cannot be overstated. So what we're seeing here in this data most likely is the impact of the accommodations that people made in their systems in response to COVID that resulted in fewer people being re-arrested and fewer people returning to incarceration. What this says to the Marion County Reentry Coalition is that those might've been some very powerful accommodations and now our strategies should be about, how do we maintain those?

Lena Hackett:

We've talked about what the coalition is and now we want to talk about, well, who the coalition people are, because this is going to lead us to the community engagement piece. We've set the framework and now we need to engage the community in being a part of this really powerful coalition.

Lena Hackett:

What I alluded to before is that this is not about creating a plan, handing the plan to someone and saying, "Here's your three to five year strategic plan to address successful reentry in the community. We really look forward to seeing how that's going to turn out for you." This is about the people you put in the room, the communities that you engage making this commitment to move from talk to action, which means that it's pivotal who those people are, what agencies are represented, and it's pivotal that they represent by race, age, and gender the population that you're addressing.

Lena Hackett:

Most importantly is that these are folks who have a sphere of influence. They have an ability to change a system and implement a program to activate a church group, a congregation, an advocacy group. They have a place to go to motivate people to move to action. So this is not a room. Your coalition is not a room for people who are just interested in this idea. You really need to be very deliberate in terms of who they are in terms of their sphere of influence and how they relate to each other.

Lena Hackett:

As an example, I know this is also really small text, but these are the partners, these are the coalition members for the Marion County Reentry Coalition. As you can see, it's federal agencies, it's state agencies, it's universities, it's local public agencies, the public defender, the public prosecutor, the Sheriff's office. But it's also a whole list of nonprofit organizations who have a role in reentry. All of these folks come together in a coalition and they work together on a common result. I think we know that you can put a lot of people in a room and they can all participate in the same meeting; but they participate, some talk, some don't talk, they hear what's going on and they leave. Coalition is very different in terms of each one of your members has a role to move to action and to work in collaboration.

Lena Hackett:

When the reentry coalition started, we had 40 people in the room and it was supposed to operate for about 18 months. That was the time limit. As the strategies evolved and the coalition began to develop, you can see we went far beyond 40 members in the room. They started in 2009 and they're still operating because they believe their work wasn't done yet. Because of the intensity of the work they were doing and the commitment, this group of people, that power of the coalition has maintained them.

Lena Hackett:

But these are some other things that are really important in a coalition. Coalition is not about there being a leader, a chairperson, a steering committee. It is of equal power. Every voice, every person at that table is of equal power. Decisions that are made, strategies that are decided on are consensus based. So coalitions are not about having winners and losers. It's about moving forward united as a whole. So we're removing that power dynamic and everyone is of equal power. So if one person in that room is not willing to move forward on a strategy, until you can negotiate to a point where everybody's ready to move forward, that strategy doesn't move forward.

Lena Hackett:

We use a context called proposal based decision making where someone puts forward a proposal and everyone discusses it and compromises and molds that strategy until it is acceptable across all partners, which really then means everyone is there supporting it and everyone is there moving forward. You don't have the case where people are saying, "You know, I really voted against that strategy, so you, as a smaller group, go forward with that. I'm going to sit back here and watch and not put my resources in the table because it wasn't a strategy that I wanted." This removes that. So this is a process of getting to consensus so everybody owns those strategies.

Lena Hackett:

But coalitions don't just happen. As you have worked to figure out who do you need in the room, who is it in your community that really needs to be engaged because they're a leader of a congregation, because they're a leader of a public agency, because they are a policymaker, because they run a not-for-profit, who they are and how you know they need to be in that room, they need an infrastructure. So coalitions, as I said, don't just happen. Somebody has to convene them, somebody has to facilitate them, and somebody has to document what's happening in that room. Setting up this infrastructure is really, in terms of funding, your primary cost, because remember we're looking at no cost, low cost strategies moving forward, so your funding isn't about let's figure out how to pay for strategies. What your funding need is for a coalition is let's figure out how to make sure we have an infrastructure so that as this group is moving to action, they have support to do that.

Lena Hackett:

As an example, the Marion County Reentry Coalition operates as a whole, but they also operate in terms of, as you can see here, five strategy groups. What the strategy groups do is really help hone what the interests are of the individual members of the coalition to work in individual strategies that roll up to that whole. For instance, in the housing strategy group, that strategy group is really comprised of people who do housing for a living. So we have, in that housing group, the Public Housing Agency is the representative from HUD. We have a couple of developers who are very interested in figuring out housing for this population. In education and employment, that strategy group is universities, employers, the Chamber of Commerce and other organizations, not-for-profits, that do employment for a living. So they all come along and put their voices in the room and move together on strategies.

Lena Hackett:

They're on the right hand side. You can see what their strategies are currently for these groups. They're very powerful things, as you can see, and they're nothing that one person could do on their own. The System Redesign Work Group is redesigning the whole public defense system as it happens in Indianapolis. Not something that even the public defender themselves could do on their own. The

power of the coalition is moving these powerful strategies forward that change the system so that when the individual people are no longer in that coalition, they've been replaced by others, those strategies are now part of how this work gets done every day without funding.

Lena Hackett:

Coalitions are really hard work and the reason you do them is because it changes the system. If they're done well, the norm of how work gets done in your community changes. And it changes because of this collective voice that has instigated those changes. It's a lot of work as I keep emphasizing because I think we've all just joined a coalition and not seeing the type of action and commitment that this level of coalition requires, but they're worth it. And how do you get there? You have to invest time in developing those members. Again, the community engagement part. You're going to put 40 people in a room to say they're a coalition.

Lena Hackett:

They may at best know who each other is. Maybe they'll know what job they do. They're not in relationship with each other. This takes time. You are asking whoever's in your coalition to really share everything about who they are and what their organization does, put all of that on the table so that everyone can participate in figuring out that redesign. That's a level of trust that demands relationship. So there has to be an investment of time in building that relationship and really in building skills. You'll find that you will have people in the coalition who have not operated this way before and they'll need some skill development, some leadership development, some communication development. Take time to invest in your members.

Lena Hackett:

And as I said, these are the keys. Of everything that I've said so far, these five things are the keys. You've got to have a common result. A coalition has no power dynamic. So no one is in charge. It is owned by the whole. There must be an action agenda with accountability. So people move to action, the coalition, as a whole, knows what they're doing and they hold each other accountable and the community holds them accountable.

Lena Hackett:

The authorization piece is key, that authorization to move to action. This authorization needs to be at the level that the members of your coalition, their boss knows this is their priority, their coworkers know this is their priority and they have been authorized by the community to move to action. So they can do it in the moment. They're not going back and asking permission. They are changing the system every time they meet. And there must be a strong infrastructure to hold these members of the coalition together. With those five keys to success, you would be well on your way to strong community engagement into an active coalition that really can change the quality of life for the individuals that you're serving.

Saad Soliman:

Thank you, Derrick. Thank you, Lena. Sustaining momentum in transformative processes and humanizing change and the impact of successful collaborations. What an amazing set of systems guidance we've heard today, from creating coalitions to sustaining our efforts. And I use the word efforts very intentionally as we're all working towards critical thinking and adapting to the ever shifting landscapes in our communities and in our world, indeed. We know that the COVID-19 pandemic really changed the

service delivery of all aspects of what we do and we know that we're constantly adapting to that ever changing landscape. It's almost like driving a boat and the water and the road beneath you are moving as the boat itself is moving. And the importance of community engagement such that the services meet the people's needs. That we are all human and that we need a hand up.

Saad Soliman:

By now, we have recognized that trauma informed care promotes wellness and wellness becomes a behavior of practice. And that opens doors for trust to be built and dependable outcomes can be better expected when that trust is built. Bridging it all together really speaks to the greater ecosystems of resources and continued innovation with balanced fidelity in making a qualitative difference. As Lena mentioned, people comprise systems and bridging it all together, well, that's where momentum meets sustainability.

Saad Soliman:

When considering partners, how often do we meet? Do we meet in person? Do we meet virtually? The nuances of partnership maintenance and the need for that nurturing to inform the flow of systems and colleagues have gained capacity. Additional employer partners are a great example. Why do our reentry programs huddle so deeply around second chance employers willing to hire our returning citizens? Does this sound familiar? Okay. We have employer X that wants to hire 17 participants, keep this in-house and get our placement numbers up. This is a great example of followership and it serves a great purpose. Indeed, getting seven people placed and placement numbers are met, that's an awesome opportunity, right?

Saad Soliman:

Alternatively, leadership in this same example could look like calling a fellow executive director or a program director or a partner agency and sharing this. "I have an employer that's looking to bring on 17 employees. What if we partnered to identify the 17 most in need between both of our programs?" Now we get to the meat of the matter. Mutual benefit for the betterment of the community builds solidarity in good faith and that also galvanizes the necessary organizational metrics that can further attract resources and sustain the greater ecosystem. While we serve individual people, we, the providers, comprise the circle of care that sustains the barrier reduction efforts.

Saad Soliman:

So what does bridging mean in the context of reentry? Bridging simply means collaboration and having vested and active partners at the table such that when challenges arise, they're addressed effectively and efficiently. Working with partners and understanding that difference between leadership and followership, everyone has a role. And if we, as a practitioner, looking in this space minimize any part of the ecosystem, then you'll see failures and the breakdown of sustaining that momentum. Because when you find gaps, those gaps become challenges. Those challenges take energy. That energy then dips, it takes you away from being able to sustain the momentum of the greater movement, and that is systems change.

Saad Soliman:

Both are equally critical roles and often interchangeable. You're not always going to be in a leadership position. You're not always going to be in a followership position. However, when you find yourself

working in a collaborative building coalitions, developing, opportunities come where you have to step back and opportunities come when you have to take the bull by the horns, as they say.

Saad Soliman:

Humanizing change. There are three major components to humanizing change. Humanizing language, discarding the use of terms and language that dehumanize people, and adopting language that indicates that people are seen, heard, and valued. Now, it's critical because people want to be felt. People want to be heard. Maya Angelou said very poignantly, "People may forget what you've said to them, but they may never forget how you made them feel." And humanizing language not only for our participants but for our colleagues, for our coalitions, for our communities, quite literally builds an atmosphere that welcomes collaboration and innovation. It doesn't ostracize or offend. It simply allows everyone to come in and be themselves and be who they are and make their contribution to the space.

Saad Soliman:

Policy and procedure needs to be updated all the time. It's a constant exercise in growing and learning and adapting. And incorporating diversity, equity and inclusion into organizational values through policy galvanizes the commitment to this incredibly important task, which will translate into delivery and optimize outcomes. And that helps to sustain momentum because you're bridging the gap from when the funding may expire to the next opportunity or how to build such grassroots energy that itself sustains based on intrinsic motivations.

Saad Soliman:

Identifying cultural competence, convening the right people at the table. Reentry is best informed when people directly impacted by the systems are at the table of program delivery and optimization. The value of experiential learning in this space in partnership with the academic, with the data, with the meta-analysis, with the program knowledge and all of the different vantage points that come from subject matter experts in their own domain creates meaningful change towards refining systems that indeed are created to aid and assist that may not be achieving the desired outcome. The desired outcome may be that we'd like to see the community better enriched. However, a policy may not translate into a practice that enriches if it's not well-informed at the design point.

Saad Soliman:

And serving returning citizens, indeed, anyone in crisis is hard work. We move into the metric space so frequently and for so many reasons: grants, audits, reports. We then start losing our human connection to the actual individual person, his/her family, their neighborhood. So the most appropriate 17 placements, for example, aren't all simply in one place. We're a village and we must begin connecting like one, bringing it all together and truly feeling a part of the coalition, the community process. Then specifically trauma trained, not just trauma informed. One starting point in a trauma and restorative approach builds shared whys, shared missions so that sustaining becomes a movement together.

Saad Soliman:

In that line, humanizing change, we have to discard the language. Ex-offender, ex-convict, felon. Replacing with returning citizen, formerly incarcerated person, participant, father, son, daughter, mother, sister. Policy should center around best practices and evidence-based practices, and the data and support are here. The National Reentry Resource Center has a new more user-friendly platform website. There you can find the latest trends and most current data. And that helps guide policy that

informs diversity, equity and inclusion policies that you may be looking to adopt and incorporate to better assimilate the model of programming that you're providing. To combine reentry and humanization is to truly build sustained and contained growth and momentum. That's the hope we all need. In many contexts, predominantly Black and Brown communities are disproportionately affected. And so our cultural competence is really taking note of diversity, equity and inclusion, and that keeps people at the table.

Saad Soliman:

The impact of successful collaborations are all very well known. We see increased public safety. We see enhanced family reunification. We see economic development. We see positive leadership developed and challenges identified and addressed. And we see overall health and wellness is achieved and the social determinants of health speak to that very specific outcome. While it's a macro data mining outcome, it certainly is one that enhances our world. It is an ecosystem. Within ecosystems, the science has identified that every single element somehow affects the other. We do our programming right, we run our organizations well, our public safety is increased. That brings law enforcement stakeholders to the table around that shared value.

Saad Soliman:

Family reunification often results in increased resources within families, critical resources to access better education systems and build health and wellness and social capital. Economic development is underway. Employers access a more diverse pool of candidates. They're at the table. They'll be there. There's a workforce now. Economic development makes people vested. Employers, when they're able to access a more diverse workforce, they add to the production and the infusion of citizenship and civic engagement and civic contribution to the tax base. These are all shared values that build sustained momentum.

Saad Soliman:

You're speaking on everyone's language. That brings very specific resources to your sustained efforts. Positive leadership is developed and the entire fabric of a community is strengthened. The trauma, which is essentially toxic stress that imprints your brain behavioral response to events, is allowed a space to heal and made whole. Isn't that how we bring it all together in our lives as individuals? Isn't that something that we do? Why is it that we consider ourselves in doing this process but maybe not incorporate that into our greater systems? And that's the consideration that I would like for us to really truly consider.

Saad Soliman:

I'm going to close with my favorite quote, an operational definition of hope that I've ever heard. It was quoted by a 12th century scholar, Maimonides, and he said, "Hope is the belief in the plausibility of the possible as opposed to the resignation to the probable." That makes us all feel a little bit better about what we're doing, because when it gets hard and you find yourself challenged and you're overwhelmed and you're not able to do things on your own, you can lean on that sustained coalition. You can lean on that partnership. You can lean on that relationship that you've developed, that you've harnessed.

Saad Soliman:

That you can say, "Hey, I have a really difficult situation. Can you help me? Hey, I have a real situation where I see such potential in this young man, young woman. They may be better off in your program.

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They may be better off in your space." Because then we can consider the possible. Without that consideration, you live in the probable. And the statistical probabilities are not too good and that's what we're trying to change. That's what we're aiming to do for our communities. And I urge you to consider that, and always try to live in the possible, not the probable. Thank you.