



County Re-entry Task Forces: Research Brief

Academic Partner

John Jay College of Criminal
Justice Research and
Evaluation Center

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Summary

The Division of Criminal Justice Services partnered with the John Jay College Research and Evaluation Center to conduct qualitative interviews with Coordinators in the 20 County Re-entry Task Forces funded throughout New York State. The research team sought to better understand how the Task Forces support participants, particularly through the delivery of Interactive Journaling and **Ready, Set, Work!** interventions.

Background

With the goal of reducing recidivism and promoting community safety, the County Re-entry Task Forces (CRTFs) provide support and resources to address the needs of individuals returning from prison to the community. The New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) supported 20 CRTFs statewide in 2025, in collaboration with the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS). CRTFs coordinate a broad range of services for individuals at a moderate to high risk of recidivism. Services typically include housing assistance, employment readiness and behavioral health services, substance use treatment referrals, access to necessities, and help securing vital documents such as personal identification. DCJS sought to examine how services were being delivered, the consistency of service delivery across sites, and the delivery of Interactive Journaling (IJ), a cognitive-behavioral intervention, and **Ready, Set, Work! (RSW!)**, an evidence-based employment readiness curriculum.

Evaluation Overview

Between April and July 2025, the research team at John Jay College conducted structured interviews with each CRTF coordinator to gain a deeper understanding of how CRTFs operate, and support individuals released from prison. Researchers examined CRTF practices, generally, and the delivery of Interactive Journaling (IJ) and **RSW!** curricula, in particular.

Interviews were conducted virtually, and responses were summarized in a final report.

Key Findings

In general, the findings demonstrate a high degree of alignment with the guidance DCJS has provided to standardize operations in the CRTFs. The interviews revealed a shared commitment to reducing future criminal activity by providing well-rounded support to address the needs of each participant. Coordinators develop personalized service plans for each client, tailoring the services to the specific needs of the participant. Once enrolled, programs engage participants by being flexible and responsive to their needs. While engagement is designed to last approximately 120 days, some participants stay connected for six to twelve months, depending on their needs and progress.

CRTF staff maintain relationships with a wide network of partners, including DCJS, DOCCS, and community-based organizations. Clients are connected to services through partnerships with local organizations such as housing providers, substance use treatment agencies, food pantries, and libraries providing digital literacy programs. Many CRTFs directly provide vocational and educational support, including employment training, job fairs, and GED preparation. CRTF Coordinators emphasized that strong community partnerships help participants feel supported and engaged with the program.

The research team closely examined the delivery of Interactive Journaling, a cognitive behavioral intervention (CBI) designed to promote self-reflection, personal growth, and positive decision making. Some programs deliver IJ in a one-on-one format, while others use group sessions. One-on-one sessions allow for deeper engagement and let the participant work at their own pace, while group sessions create a shared space for peer interactions and mutual support. Programs report that both formats produce effective results. Many CRTFs use a blend of both formats, using individual sessions as a make-up tool for missed group sessions. CRTFs use journals grounded in cognitive-behavioral frameworks to guide participant reflection and growth. Most programs begin with a foundational journal such as "Getting Started," and then use other titles tailored to the participant's needs and goals. Participants typically complete three journals, with programs encouraging participation through gift cards and framing the journals as helpful for personal growth. Program coordinators emphasized flexibility, remaining available even outside of scheduled programming, and remaining responsive to participants who need longer-term support to complete their journals.

Some CRTF coordinators noted that starting IJ early can help keep participants engaged during the first few weeks of programming, allowing them to make progress while waiting for other service appointments. Several programs also integrate anger management with IJ, as it is often a mandated condition for parolees. Staff noted that pairing anger management with IJ increases engagement and provides a structured cognitive-behavioral approach. Some CRTFs noted additional modifications to IJ to increase its accessibility and relatability, such as adapting the content for participants with lower literacy levels or diverse learning needs using a variety of interactive strategies.

Staff noted that IJ contributes to positive outcomes for participants. Allowing participants to select journals that align with their goals helps to improve engagement. Many programs found that pairing IJ with motivational interviewing on topics such as employment readiness and anger management can increase participation. A key theme is the central role played by IJ facilitators, who are trained by DCJS. Many staff emphasized the importance of training for group management, engagement strategies, and maintaining fidelity to the curriculum.

Sixteen of the twenty CRTFs also deliver **RSWI**, a 20-hour employment readiness curriculum designed to prepare justice-involved individuals for the workforce. **RSWI** comprises 10 modules that can be delivered in-person or virtually, covering topics such as interview preparation, career goal setting, and workplace expectations. Some versions of the program

incorporate additional content such as financial literacy and job retention, while others offer vocational training and certifications. CRTFs that deliver **RSWI** have facilitators who are certified through intensive training and bring real-world experience to help participants relate to the material. Group settings are standard, with some programs offering flexible scheduling to accommodate participant availability and improve their chances of completion. Participants receive a certificate for completing **RSWI**. Some also graduate with a resume that the program helped them create.

CRTF staff see **RSWI** as a manageable curriculum for participants who need to balance parole requirements, employment searches, housing needs, and family responsibilities. Some programs supplement **RSWI** by helping participants develop basic computer and internet skills, job search strategies, and interview preparation. Program staff report that participants value the hands-on components of **RSWI**, such as resume building, mock interviews, and opportunities to meet with guest speakers. Incentives such as lunches, bus passes, and gift cards help to boost engagement, while partnerships with the Department of Labor or other employment programs can offer tangible next steps to employment. Despite the benefits of **RSWI**, some participants face barriers to engagement, including transportation issues, mental health challenges, and competition from paid work or other programs.

Recommendations to Improve IJ and **RSWI**

The research team offered several recommendations to improve IJ and **RSWI** delivery, participant engagement, and curriculum content.

1. Tailor the delivery of IJ to the participants.

- Maintain flexibility in IJ delivery, offering individual and group sessions, with in-person and virtual options.
- Allow participants to choose journals to support the personal relevance of topics.
- Streamline the curriculum to reduce the time burden on participants with other priorities.
- Combine IJ with practical topics such as anger management, recovery-related topics, or employment readiness training.
- Continue to expand staff training, particularly in motivational interviewing.

2. Modernize the **RSWI** curriculum to increase engagement.

- Update the curriculum to incorporate the kinds of jobs that are currently hiring, digital job search resources, and lessons about the role of artificial intelligence in many job fields.

3. Update and expand *RSW!* facilitator training.

- Provide facilitators with pre-developed presentation materials and templates to streamline lesson preparation and ensure consistency across sites.
- Shift training toward practical implementation rather than theory-heavy content.
- Expand training access through virtual or hybrid options to reduce travel and certify more staff.

4. Continue to make *RSW!* delivery flexible.

- Allow for hybrid or virtual participation.
- Add content tailored to the specific populations being served.
- Expand hands-on instruction in areas such as resume writing, financial literacy, and engaging with employers.

About the Justice Lab

An initiative of the state Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), the Justice Lab seeks to ask, analyze, and answer questions about the impacts of justice policies in New York State. We strive to build upon DCJS's commitment to promoting evidence-based policymaking to improve the justice system by leveraging the expertise of internal staff as well other state agency partners.