

BUILDING JOBS



Rebuilding Lives

*Placing Ex-offenders with Employers in the Residential  
and Light Commercial Construction Industry*



Affiliated with  
**NAHB**  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF HOME BUILDERS

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# Introduction

Research and experience in the field of corrections have shown clearly that there is a relationship between employment of ex-offenders and lower recidivism rates. There can be no question that employment at a living wage has a tremendous positive influence on the future course of ex-offenders' lives and on society in general.

Placing these individuals in good jobs however, is generally easier said than done. Ex-offenders have traditionally been one of the more difficult populations to place in meaningful, long-term employment. Admittedly there are a number of substantial barriers in the way of putting ex-offenders to work.

Efforts that simply seek to place ex-offenders in whatever jobs are available at a given time will certainly achieve some success. This technique however, is unlikely to result in significant and consistent success. What is needed is a more focused,

method of facilitating ex-offender employment. This manual presents such a method.

The concept examined here involves a different way of looking at job development and placement for ex-offenders. The Home Builders Institute (HBI, the educational arm of the National Association of Home Builders) believes that viewing inmates and their skills and abilities as valuable, marketable products, is one part of a two-pronged strategy that will result in a more effective way of meeting the employment needs of ex-offenders.

The second part of

the strategy is targeting employers in the home building and light commercial construction industry. This specific segment of the job market is one of the most promising for ex-offenders. This marketing-based process is an innovative and viable means of reducing recidivism rates through providing gainful employment for ex-offenders.

The marketing method has the potential to replace or augment current efforts of placing ex-offenders which tend to be random, with more systematic and effective techniques.

In presenting the marketing approach to obtain-

ing employment for ex-offenders, this manual takes classic marketing techniques and adapts them to the needs of the particular situation, placing ex-offenders in meaningful employment. It is meant to serve as an outline which placement personnel can use to create their own unique marketing-based placement programs, or to expand existing programs through the addition of a marketing component. The information given here may be modified to develop programs meeting the needs of various types of correctional facilities or services.

Rising costs associated with incarceration, and a desire to lighten the public burden in paying those costs, makes reducing recidivism not so much a humanitarian ideal as a practical necessity. Hopefully, this manual will contribute substantially to achieving this goal.

The Home Builders Institute and the Colorado Department of Corrections are grateful to the United States Department of Education, Office of Correctional Education for their support of this project.

# The Marketing Approach

The marketing approach, in brief, consists of identifying these target markets, linking them to products, and offering the products to them in ways that emphasize the benefits to be derived by using them. This leads to the creation of a consumer-need-product-benefit relationship that is the purpose of the marketing approach to selling.

## THE ESSENTIALS OF MARKETING RESEARCH AND THE MARKETING PLAN

Marketing encompasses all of the many methods used to connect products and services with consumers in the marketplace. Successful marketing efforts are structured around data obtained through studying every stage of the "life cycle" of a particular product or service, from development, to promotion, to post-sales follow-up.

This vital information is obtained by using a very basic and yet powerful marketing tool: market research. An in-depth examination of both the market and the product is the heart of this type of study. The data obtained are analyzed and used to create a marketing plan, another of the primary tools used in marketing.

### WHAT IS MARKETING?

Although the ins-and-outs of marketing might seem complex to the uninitiated, the basic idea behind marketing is quite simple. The concept is based on the fact that for every product or service there exists a particular group or groups of consumers the "target market"— which have similar needs that can be met through use of the product or service being offered. Marketing takes this concept and applies it to selling by "aiming" products and services toward distinct segments of the consumer market.

Over the years, as the science (and art) of marketing developed, a set of specific requirements for creating a workable marketing plan have been identified. Although these essentials may be presented in different ways or phrased differently from one marketing plan to another, the points themselves make up a standard, generally accepted approach to generating a marketing plan.

For the purposes of this manual, these requirements have been condensed to six basic steps. The present section outlines these steps in a



generic fashion. The information that follows will focus on how these points can be applied specifically to the purpose of marketing ex-offenders to the

home building industry.

The six components of a marketing plan are:

- An objective stating what the plan intends to accomplish, both in gen-

eral and specific terms.

- Analysis of the needs of the target market as they relate to the product.
- Evaluation of how the product can meet the needs of the target market.
- Market penetration strategy how the product can be most effectively introduced to the market and sold.
- Post-sales follow-up strategy which includes,

may include the overall aim of the plan, as well as specific goals that may have been set, such as desired gross sales or a targeted percentage of increase in sales over an earlier period. Other components of the objective will be an identification of the target market and the rationale behind selection of that market segment.

The second step or point involves identifying the needs of the target

can meet the needs identified in the target market. Thus the next step is critically examining the strengths and weaknesses of the product to provide a clear understanding of what the product can and cannot do. In socially responsible marketing practice, it is undesirable either to undersell or oversell a product.

The needs of the target market, and ways in which the product can meet those needs, will determine the parameters of the next step, formulating the market penetration strategy. This will be the actual blueprint for getting the product into the market and selling it. Also known as a "product positioning strategy," this part of the plan outlines how the product will be positioned in the market and presented to potential customers so that actual sales will result.

Although successful sales are the ultimate objective of the marketing plan, a completed sale should not mark the end of the marketing process. In today's competitive marketplace, products that come with the promise of "service after the sale" will usually have a decided edge over those that do not.

This consideration leads to the next step in the plan, post-sales follow-up, which has many facets and serves multiple functions in marketing. A carefully thought-out and consistently applied post-sales follow-up strategy is of great importance to any marketing plan and should not be overlooked or taken lightly.

Post-sales follow-up provides information that can be of great value in assessing the marketing plan and its effectiveness in promoting product sales. Periodic evaluation of the plan, based on the results obtained through follow-up, can help pinpoint weaknesses or gaps in the plan.

Follow-up also allows marketers to detect market trends changes in the market which can indicate that a marketing plan be modified. Whether a plan simply needs to be fine-tuned, or completely overhauled, information from post-sales follow-up is essential to the process.

Ending involvement in the product-customer relationship immediately after the sale also precludes the possibility of creating lasting relationships with customers which can result in further

“  
The goal of any  
(employment-focused  
program) should be to  
place capable employees  
and not to have companies  
take any increased risk..”

“The Employment Problems of  
Ex-Offenders”, NIC report VK 52510.

- Assessment of marketing plan and results

The first part of the plan, the objective, is made up of several separate but related components. First, the objective should state the desired goals of the marketing plan. This should be a clear and concise explanation of what the plan is meant to accomplish. A marketing plan objective

market. This consists of determining what specific needs exist in the target market that the product has potential to meet. How the product will be presented to the target market to make it most appealing will be dictated by the results of this research.

Equally crucial to successful marketing is evaluating how the product

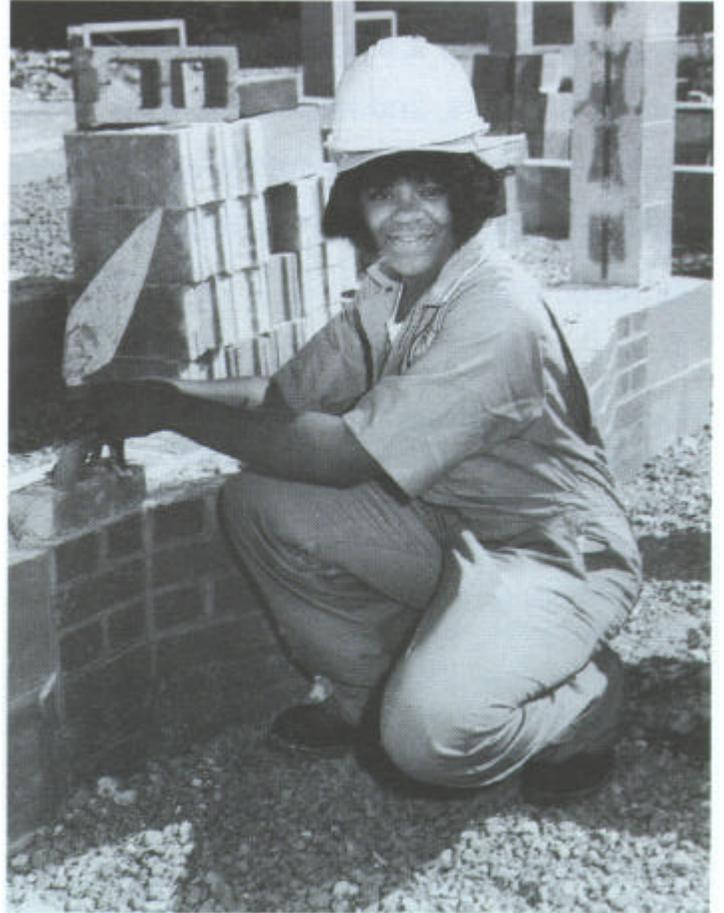
sales and referrals. This relates to the cultivation of "product loyalty" on the part of customers, the importance of which should never be underestimated. The activities involved in post-sales follow-up help solidify the relationship between the product and the customer, by providing customer service and product support.

Additionally, post-sales follow-up permits the collection of information that can be used for accountability purposes, to develop marketing efforts for other products, and for public relations or promotional use.

These six steps are the underpinnings of a successful marketing plan, distilled to the very basics.

The extent to which each point is developed, which in turn determines the length and complexity of a marketing plan, depends on the nature of the product and of the specific strategies in mind to sell it. In general, marketing plans do not have to be large or complicated. They need only be extensive enough to adequately present the information collected during research and allow for an accurate interpretation of it.

This then, is an outline of the process of marketing in general. The following section examines these steps as they are applied specifically to marketing ex-offenders to employers in the home building industry.



# Marketing Ex-Offenders

Placing ex-offenders in meaningful employment can be thought of as essentially a marketing activity. Just as architects, manufacturers, Realtors, and bankers market their products and services to the home building industry, so too can ex-offenders with their skill and abilities be marketed as a “product,” that is, as potentially valuable employees.

In reality, there are few differences between marketing goods and services to consumers and marketing ex-offenders to the home building industry. Techniques similar to those used to get consumers to see the benefits of using a certain

mouthwash or automobile can also be applied to ex-offenders and the home building industry. The basic strategy is the same: the product (ex-offenders) must be presented to the customer (employers in home building) in ways that point

out and emphasize the benefits of using (hiring) them

## DEVELOPING A MARKETING PLAN FOR EX-OFFENDERS

The following section will guide the reader through the steps necessary to creating a basic marketing plan that will meet the goal of this manual, marketing ex-offenders to the home building industry. The information presented here will give placement personnel a template from which to construct a more defined and focused marketing plan based on their own particular circumstances and the specific needs of home builder employers in their area.

## OBJECTIVE: MARKETING EX-OFFENDERS TO THE HOME BUILDING INDUSTRY

The objective of this marketing plan is to market ex-offenders and their skills to employers in the home building industry. As stated earlier, one component of a marketing plan objective is identification of the target market. Part of the process of identifying a target market is understanding why a particular segment of the market holds promise as a target. As this manual identifies the home building industry as the target, it is important to examine the rationale behind this choice briefly.

For correctional staffs seeking to increase employment opportunities for ex-offenders, the idea of establishing linkages with the wide variety of jobs represented in the overall job market may seem overwhelming. Particular segments of the market however, have certain characteristics that make them ideal as targets for efforts to provide employment for ex-offenders. Target marketing permits placement staffs to focus on the most likely niche in the



job market in which to place ex-offenders. This approach allows resources, which these days are usually limited, to be used in the most effective and efficient manner. The residential and light commercial construction industry is one of the more promising of these segments. In most areas of the country shortages of labor in the industry have reached critical proportions, while the demand for housing continues to increase. This, along with the fact that the industry has fewer of the traditional barriers to employment that are prevalent in many other industries and has a broad range of job types and career opportunities, makes this an excellent niche in the job market to focus on in creating placement opportunities for ex-offenders.

Besides the general goal of placing ex-offenders in employment in the home building industry, the objective may also include very specific goals such as:

- The number of individuals expected to be placed in a given program-year
- Expected or desired wages and benefits
- What kinds of support

services will be used to facilitate placement

- Criteria for determining what will constitute a "successful" placement i.e. minimum length of job retention, pay increases, additional training received.
- Accountability measures for the placement program the specific guidelines that will be used to judge the success of the program.

Remember that these specific goals should reflect reasonable expectations for the placement program given the resources (including funding and personnel) available. It is better to start by meeting or exceeding modest goals and building on success than to over-promise or under-deliver.

Meeting, or exceeding, program goals can create a kind of centrifugal force, a natural motion that will propel placement programs forward in spite of obstacles.

### **IDENTIFY NEEDS OF THE TARGET MARKET: OVERVIEW OF THE HOME BUILDING INDUSTRY**

This section will lay the groundwork for a locally-based description of what home building industry employers in a given

locality need from workers. By outlining what constitutes a successful employee in the industry, the information presented here will help placement personnel identify the employment needs of the industry.

The residential and light construction industry is a major component of the business environment in the United States, employing millions of workers and pumping billions of dollars into the economy annually.

As large as the industry is in aggregate, it consists for the most part of small and medium-sized businesses focused in local markets. The largest percentage of businesses in the industry has between four and ten employees. Many companies will consist simply of the owner and two or three employees.

Businesses comprising and serving the home building industry can be union or non-union. In some locales, contractors do both union and non-union work. By its nature however, the home building industry is composed of businesses that would not naturally be union-focused.

Since most businesses in the industry tend to be

these smaller entrepreneurial-type companies, they are, out of necessity, intensely profit oriented. Bottom lines are tight, as are schedules for completing jobs. Because of this, each employee is a critical element in the success or failure of the enterprise. One chronically absent or unproductive employee in a workforce of seventy-five or eighty may not have an immediately noticeable effect on the stability of a business. If such an employee is one of a crew of only four or five however, the results will be obvious and extreme.

Small business owners in the building industry do not have the time or money to cover for employees who constantly make mistakes or do not carry their share of the load on the worksite. Nor do they have the resources to hire personnel directors to handle problems with employees, or training instructors to work with those whose skills may be deficient. These small businesses are unlikely to offer a large array of benefits to employees. Worker's Compensation insurance is generally provided however, since it is usually required by law.

Employers in the home building industry appreciate hard work, dependability, physical dexterity, and the possession of basic manual skills. Educational requirements vary depending on the type of job, but in general, these requirements are not extensive. Specific educational skills that employees in home building do need will be discussed later in this section.

Two types of core businesses make up the industry: builders, who handle every facet of the home building process including land acquisition and development, design, financing, construction, and sale of the finished product, and general contractors, whose primary focus is construction.

The generic category of "builder," may be further divided into two sub-categories, speculative builders and custom builders. The speculative builder obtains financing, buys the lot, builds the home, and then offers it for sale. The custom builder builds homes on order from specific customers. Both types of businesses may be large or small, with many employees or only a few.

General contracting businesses largely control the contracting end of the industry. These firms are responsible for overseeing the overall building process and for subcontracting with specialized contractors for plumbing, electrical, carpentry, concrete, painting and other work. The function of the general contractor is that of coordinating the individual processes and businesses involved in construction, while specialized contractors provide the work in their field.

A distinct segment of the residential and light commercial construction industry comes under the general classification of remodeling. Builders in this line of work may be involved in the renovation, rehabilitation, or alteration and improvement of existing structures. These types of businesses tend to be smaller even more frequently than those involved in new construction, most of them having between one and ten employees. Remodeling, however, is the fastest growing segment of the building industry. As housing prices rise, increasing numbers of families are deciding to renovate their present home or purchase a "previously occupied"

home and alter it to suit their requirements rather than invest in the construction of a new one.

The current emphasis on historical preservation in the United States has led to the development of a specialized classification of remodeling businesses, those involved in the restoration and/or "adaptive reuse" of older or historical structures. These firms engage in work that requires many of the same basic skills needed in new construction and general remodeling, as well as more specialized skills.

The home building industry offers opportunities for advancement unparalleled in any other. Because of the nature of advancement in the industry, and the importance of on-the-job-training (OJT), it is entirely possible to start at the bottom and work one's way up to the top.

Many an individual, for example, has started in an entry-level job as a carpenter's helper and has advanced over the years through the positions of carpenter, crew leader, carpenter foreman, general construction foreman, to end up owning their own carpentry subcontracting business. The

same scenario can be played out in many of the other construction trades.

This "career ladder" concept is an important element in the industry. It opens the possibility of not only finding well paying jobs for ex-offenders, but also of being able to start them on the path to a personally and financially satisfying career. The idea of placing ex-offenders in careers, and not just jobs, is an exciting one that should not be over looked in job development and placement for ex-offenders.

As stated earlier, OJT forms the basis of training in the home building industry, and can be obtained either informally or through formal industry-sponsored training programs. Many programs, offering training on the preapprenticeship and apprenticeship levels, are in operation around the country. These types of programs are usually sponsored by builders associations, vocational/technical schools, community agencies, correctional institutions, and similar groups.

Preapprenticeship programs offer a level of training which qualifies the graduate to take entry-level positions in a

particular trade, or to enter an apprenticeship program to receive further training and obtain journey-level certification.

Although industry specific education at the community college or 4-year college level is becoming more important in the industry, individuals interested in careers in building do not necessarily need to receive formal training. Many workers in construction receive their training through several years of working as helpers in the chosen trade. The route an ex-offender can take to get training is largely determined by his or her previous experience, aptitude, and personal circumstances.

### **WHAT EMPLOYERS IN THE HOME BUILDING INDUSTRY NEED: THE BASICS OF EMPLOYABILITY**

Building new homes and remodeling existing ones requires the services of a number of specialized trades, from carpentry to landscaping. Potential employment for ex-offenders may also exist in allied businesses such as landscaping, surveying, materials handling, transportation, maintenance, or wholesale/retail sales.

Although each of these areas have particu-



lar requirements as to specific skills, all of the building trades and related fields share a need for workers with the same basic educational skills, personal aptitudes, and physical characteristics. Examining these "basics of employability," will help delineate the minimum qualifications building industry employers need and look for in potential employees.

As with any other industry or business, employers in the home building industry require basic documentation showing that the potential employee is legally enti-

tled to work in the United States. This includes a valid Social Security number and card and proof of citizenship. For non-citizens a current work visa will be needed. Most employers will require that applicants have a valid driver's license as well. If an inmate has taken advantage of any programs during incarceration that have resulted in improving his or her skills or abilities, documentation should be kept and made available to potential employers. This can include any educational achievements (obtaining a GED, taking correspon-

dence or in-house courses), technical training courses, and even physical conditioning activities such as running or weight lifting. These are all things that have a bearing on the employability of ex-offenders.

Other documentation, such as contact information for previous employers and military service and/or discharge information should also be provided. Ex-offenders seeking employment may need to provide information regarding parole or probation information as well.

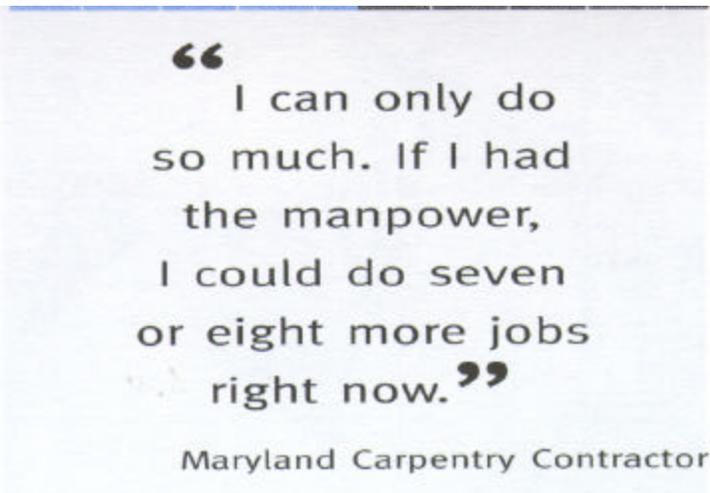
After these basics are provided, employers will want workers who demonstrate such personal traits as self-discipline, respect for authority, a willingness to work (even at dirty and unpleasant jobs), honesty, dependability, and a strong sense of the work ethic.

Since much construction work is done by crews, it is essential that employees be able to work as part of a team, follow directions, and know how to handle conflicts with supervisors and crew mates appropriately. However, since some tasks will be completed by individual

employees, they should also be able to take the initiative and follow through on tasks without the need for constant, close supervision.

Notice that these basic requirements are not necessarily skill or education based. These are basic employability skills, abilities that many ex-offenders will already have, or which can be cultivated in those who lack them. In spite of the importance of educational and technical skills, most employers value these elemental skills above specific occupational skills. A person in possession of these skills will be well on the way to becoming a valued employee in the home building industry.

The complexity of the employment market in general today, however, demands that all job seekers have a certain minimum level of education. It is increasingly difficult for individuals without a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED) to find living-wage employment. The home building industry is no exception. Although not all do, many jobs in the industry now require a high school diploma or GED.



These credentials are required for all apprenticeship training programs and many preapprenticeship programs.

The spread of high technology to the worksite and the increasingly complex nature of products and processes in use make it essential that potential employees be literate and numerate. These are not new ideas, but they do have specialized meanings in the building industry.

Literacy, of course, refers to the ability to read and write. In residential construction literacy means specifically the ability to read and comprehend safety, product, and other instructional materials, fill out and understand maintenance request forms, purchase orders, and invoices. Of particular importance on the worksite is the ability to read and understand

blueprints and other written instructions and directions.

As with literacy, the general definition of numeracy mastery of the basic symbols and processes of mathematics takes on a specific meaning here.

Numeracy in residential construction is defined as the ability to read and understand measuring devices such as rulers, tapes, and various dials and gauges. Employees must also be able to execute the formulas required to calculate required lengths of lumber, piping, and wire or cable, figure angles, and do the computations needed to check bills and estimates and total purchase orders and invoices.

As for physical characteristics, the broad range of jobs in the building industry, and the tasks that are a part of those jobs, create a broad spec-

trum of physical requirements. Although most jobs require some degree of physical dexterity, stamina, and strength, the level needed can vary widely.

Heavy lifting, standing for long periods, toleration of extreme heat and cold, climbing ability, balance, hand-to-eye coordination, acute vision and hearing, and quick reflexes, are all physically related factors that will have varying degrees of importance in the workplace, and should be considered in matching employees with jobs.

Another way of looking at the skills required by employers is contained in a report recently issued by the U.S. Department of Labor's "Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills", or the "SCANS" report. Completed in 1991, this study was commissioned to determine the skills and other attributes needed by Americans to compete in the increasingly high-performance, competitive workplace. Although this report is not industry-specific, it mirrors very closely the skills, aptitudes, and characteristics needed by employers in the home building industry.

The SCANS report

identifies five basic educational skills, six thinking skills, and five workplace competencies that workers need in today's workplace. The SCANS factors go beyond the traditional "three Rs." Increasingly, instructional programs in all settings are couched in SCANS language. In so far as the correctional institution or service can specify and encourage the achievement of these employer demanded competencies in ex-offenders, the task of marketing them to employers will be that much easier.

Further information regarding the SCANS Report can be obtained from the United States Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 200 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20010 (Telephone: (202) 219-5921 Fax: (202) 219-5011). You may also access SCANS information online at:

<http://www.ttrc.doleta.gov/SCANS/>

### **SPECIFIC TRADES**

The preceding information provides a general outline of the basic requirements of employers in the residential and light commercial construction industry. Specific

needs will of course vary with the trade and the geographic area. In order to give a slightly more in-depth picture of the industry and of its labor requirements, information on the major trades in the industry, from the United States Department of Labor, may be helpful. This will provide relevant information which may be useful in targeting specific areas within the industry for job development and placement efforts.

### **Carpentry**

Carpentry is the largest of the construction trades. In 1996, approximately 996,000 carpenters were employed, almost one-third of whom were self-employed. Carpenters with skills in all aspects of the trade work most steadily because they have the versatility to perform whatever types of jobs are available. Although the number of jobs in this field is expected to grow slowly, job opportunities in the trade should be excellent because high turnover will create many openings. Most carpenters learn their trade on the job, either as helpers or through formal apprenticeship programs.

### **Electrical**

In 1996, electricians held about 575,000 jobs. More than half of this number were employed in the construction industry. Others were employed as maintenance electricians in industrial settings. One out of ten electricians is self-employed. Job opportunities are expected to be excellent for electricians as well as for electricians' helpers.

### **Painting and Paperhanging**

Painters and paperhangers make up one of the larger construction occupations. In 1996, there were about 449,000 persons employed in this field, the majority of whom were painters. Most painters and paperhangers work for contractors engaged in new construction, repair, restoration, or remodeling work. In addition, organizations that own or manage large buildings such as apartment complexes also employ painters. Opportunities for employment in this trade are good due to high job turnover rates, and many painters and paperhangers are self-employed. Painters and paperhangers usually learn the trade informally, as on-the-job helpers to experienced craftspeople.

### **Plumbing**

Plumbers held approximately 389,000 jobs in 1996. About two-thirds of these were employed by mechanical and plumbing contractors engaged in new construction, repair, modernization, or maintenance work. Almost one out of every five plumbers is self-employed. Although the number of jobs in this trade is expected to grow slowly, job opportunities should be excellent because fewer people than needed are seeking training in the field.

### **Bricklaying**

Bricklayers held about 142,000 jobs in 1996. Workers in this trade were employed mainly by special trade, building, or general contractors. Although bricklayers work throughout the country; opportunities in this field tend to be more plentiful in urban areas. Nearly one out of four bricklayers is self-employed. Many bricklayers pick up the skills of the trade informally by observing and helping experienced bricklayers. Some learn the trade in vocational schools and apprenticeship programs however. Opportunities in this trade are expected

to be very good because job openings are growing faster than the number of workers being trained.

## **Drywall**

### **Installation/Finishing**

Drywall workers held some 133,000 jobs in 1996. Most worked for contractors specializing in drywall installation. Others worked for contractors involved in many different types of construction. Almost one-third of drywall installers and finishers were self-employed. Like carpentry, the turnover rate is high. This should ensure excellent prospects in this field even though job growth is expected to occur slowly. Unlike many trade specialties in construction, work in this field is indoors, with few interruptions due to inclement weather. Most drywall workers learn the trade on the job, either by working as helpers or through a formal apprenticeship program.

Local research will reveal the needs of specific segments of the industry and the level of demand for the various trades in the locale. This will allow the development of a sharply focused marketing effort geared specifically to the labor market in their own area.

There is no substitute for knowing the industry and the needs of its employers. The more knowledge placement personnel have of the nature of the work and the workplace, the easier it will be to place ex-offenders and to anticipate and solve problems which could derail a successful placement.

### **EVALUATING THE PRODUCT: THE SKILLS AND ABILITIES OF EX-OFFENDERS**

Successfully marketing ex-offenders to employers in the home building industry requires a knowledge of what is being marketed as well as knowing what the market needs. Unless the needs of the home building industry and the interests and abilities of ex-offenders mesh, employers will see no benefit in hiring them. A thorough knowledge of what ex-offenders have to offer these employers, both as a group and individually, is the crucial factor which allows the two interests represented here to come together. Identifying how ex-offenders can meet the needs of home building employers means, simply, defining and evaluating the aptitudes, traits, skills,

and work experience they may have that would be useful to industry employers. It may be surprising to discover that even individuals who have never worked in construction or related fields possess abilities that can be put to work in the industry.

There are a number of general methods and specific tools which can be used to identify an individual's capabilities. Some are formal, some are informal, but all can be useful in documenting an ex-offender's suitability for employment in the home building industry.

Networking with agencies and organizations which provide various services to inmates and ex-offenders is an excellent way to learn about what an individual has to offer employers. Whether inside or outside of the correctional institution, individuals working for such groups are on the "front lines" and will be able to offer useful insights about the skills and interests of inmates and ex-offenders.

Examples of such providers are personnel involved with inmates in literacy education, social skills development, and vocational/technical skills

skills-building efforts.

Representatives of post-release systems can also be an important resource, as can personnel already involved in job development and placement.

In addition to this, there are a number of written tests which can be used to distinguish aptitudes. The General Aptitude Test Battery is one such instrument. Like the well-known Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), the GATB offers a way to take an extensive inventory of aptitudes and work interests. Other tests of this type are available and may be accessed through local community colleges and vocational/technical schools.

Aside from these "pencil-and-paper" methods of taking stock of an ex-offender's abilities and interests, the Home Builders Institute has discovered that even a few simple but carefully phrased questions can determine much about a person's interest in and potential ability to work in the home building industry.

These are some examples of questions that have been developed to help assess the trans-

ferable skills and interest levels of adults expressing an interest in entering the construction field:

- ***Do you enjoy building or repairing things?***

Depending on the answer received, the interviewer could follow up by asking additional questions designed to draw the person out about what specific types of projects they have been involved in and their ability to take the initiative and to follow through on such projects.

Also, finding out about the specific types of projects engaged in can provide information about proficiency with certain kinds of tools and materials as well as the ability to work with plans and diagrams. This can also help gauge the interviewee's general inclination to undertake practical projects.

- ***Do you enjoy doing yard work or gardening?***

Again, depending on the answer received, the interviewer can ask follow up questions designed to look at the interviewee's experience in using various types of equipment, their ability to translate a site plan into reality and gauge their tolerance/enjoyment of physical work.

- ***Do you enjoy working on automobiles?***

This question allows the interviewer to explore an individual's mechanical abilities, and ability to work with relatively complex systems. It can also shed light on the interviewee's ability to follow diagrams and mechanical directions.

- ***Do you enjoy activities such as putting together models or sewing?***

By asking this type of question, an interviewer can discover something about the individual's motor skills and sense of detail.

- ***What kinds of physically demanding tasks have you done?***

This question can provide the interviewer with information regarding the interviewee's ability and willingness to perform physically taxing work.

- ***What sports or other team activities have you participated in ?***

This question will give insights into the individual's ability to work as part of a team, to take directions, and to carry them out effectively.

- ***What do you like in particular about working in the construction field?***



This line of questioning can help tell whether the individual being interviewed has realistic expectations about what to expect in the industry. The answers received can serve as a guide to placing the ex-offender in an appropriate job.

These simple questions illustrate the method of using interview technique to encourage individuals to talk about their experiences and thereby provide clues as to their interests and abilities.

Another aspect of evaluating the employability of ex-offenders concerns not skills or abilities, but more practical issues, such as transportation, tools, work clothing, medical needs, and other such things which have an effect on employment readiness. The potential for problems in these and

related areas must be examined, and the problems solved before an ex-offender can be considered ready for employment. Although most employers are more than willing to help a new employee deal with issues such as these, it must be remembered that they are looking for workers, not social services problems. Job and career counselors know that people in congenial work are more productive and satisfied employees. Assessing an individual's workplace interests for a better "fit" in the home building industry will not only help market the ex-offender to the industry and ensure productivity, but will also play a major role in making the industry an attractive job or career choice for the ex-offender.

**PENETRATION****STRATEGY:****LOCATING POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS**

The next step in the marketing plan is to develop a market penetration strategy. Now that the placement worker is armed with a thorough knowledge of what employers in the home building industry are looking for in employees, and of what ex-offenders have to offer to employ-



ers, it is time to get ex-offenders into the job market, find potential employers and generate actual job leads, and make placements. There are many ways to go about the task of finding or creating job

leads for ex-offenders. Developing job leads takes work both in the office and in the field. Despite the advent of the Internet, electronic mail, and the fax machine, there is still no substitute for legwork in the area of job development, particularly in the construction industry.

A major factor in the success or failure of a job development and placement program for ex-offenders is exposure of the program. If home building employers do not know about a program, they can hardly be expected to support it by hiring its clients. This section focuses on penetrating the job market by emphasizing program exposure.

Letting employers in the home building industry know about the benefits of hiring ex-offenders and where to find them is not difficult. Making contact with individual employers and with industry trade associations serving as networking points can provide opportunities for exposure.

An excellent way to approach the industry, and the very first route that should be followed, is to become involved in home building industry

trade associations. In fact, this option should not be saved until a program is actively seeking to place candidates. The contact described here can be useful not only for developing actual job leads, but can be beneficial in developing every aspect of a plan to market ex-offenders to the home building industry.

Many of the businesses which make up the home building industry are local members of the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), the largest trade association in the industry.

Some 200,000 businesses and individuals comprise the membership of NAHB, which serves them through providing legislative and technical information, networking opportunities, lobbying activities, the development of coordinated approaches to industry issues, and training and continuing education services and products, which are available through the Home Builders institute, the educational arm of the NAHB.

The Association has over 800 state and local chapters, known as Home Builders Associations (HBAs) or Building Industry Associations

(BIAs). State chapters largely serve the legislative and lobbying needs of builders in the state, while the local organizations serve the networking, training, education, and other specific needs of their members.

Members of these associations may be builders, contractors, trades people, suppliers, bankers, insurance brokers, realtors, teachers, or other professionals with interests lying in the home building industry.

Committees, set up to reflect the concerns of members involved in various areas of the industry, provide a forum for the discussion of issues and a means of developing strategies for solving local and regional problems. Committees representing remodelers, single-family and multi-family home builders, apartment owners, commercial construction, and other specialities or areas of concern in the industry are common.

Some of these associations operate apprenticeship programs or have relationships with vocational schools or community colleges with such programs as a means of addressing the labor needs of members. Other associations will have



educational or training committees whose activities focus on recruiting skilled workers for the industry. Some associations will not have formal activities relating to training and labor supply, but instead, will have individual members actively involved in the issue of ensuring a flow of qualified workers into the industry. In other words, almost every association will be concerned in some way with the issue of labor.

Building networks with HBA/BIA members is an invaluable way of getting exposure for ex-offender job development and placement programs and of making the contacts that will result in jobs. These members are, to a great extent, the employers who need to know that ex-offenders are available, and are willing and able to work. Many options for becoming involved with a state or local HBA or BIA exist:

- Call the local chapter and get names and telephone numbers for officers and committee members; contact them by telephone and express an interest in their organization and the potential ex-offender placement programs

have for alleviating labor shortages

- Offer to speak at membership, board, and committee meetings as well as at special events, conferences, seminars, conventions and the like
- Provide materials on the ex-offender placement program for distribution to members or publication in the Association's newsletter
- Plan a focus group with representatives from the correctional facility or service, the placement program, and the HBA/BIA; use this as an opportunity to discuss expanding employment opportunities for ex-offenders
- Invite association members to speak to job development and placement staff
- Solicit association members to volunteer to participate in educational, vocational, and related programs at the correctional institution
- Serve along with HBA/BIA members on education, community action, community development, or other local organizations
- Participate with HBAs/BIA's in employment-oriented activities such as job fairs and

career days. Use these events as an opportunity to promote the ex-offender placement program

- Contact members individually.

These same strategies can be used to good effect with trade associations other than NAHB. The Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), Associated General Contractors of America (AGC), National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI), and others all share common interests and concerns, and can provide an excellent means of familiarizing the building industry with the benefits of hiring ex-offenders.

While on the topic of making professional contacts for the program, it should also be mentioned that networking with other non-industry professional organizations can also be useful. Building industry employers tend to be involved in a variety of causes in their communities as a means of keeping informed on matters that affect their market. Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis Clubs, and similar groups are always looking for speakers for membership meetings. These provide more valuable opportuni-

ties which can result in significant exposure for placement programs.

The goal of these activities is to "get the word out" about job development and placement programs for ex-offenders. This will inevitably result in job leads and employment opportunities. Interacting with members of the target market in this way is the essence of market penetration.

Developing contacts by becoming visible in industry trade groups is an important way of getting into the target market. Although this will undoubtedly produce results right from the start, it may be seen as particularly effective as a long-term strategy. Other ways to go about getting ex-offenders working in the target segment of the job market are more pragmatic and short-term.

There are an almost endless number of ways to go about this. Formulating this part of the market penetration strategy requires careful thought: a bit of imagination as well will not hurt. The basic question being asked here is "Where can jobs in the home building industry be found?" The

answer results in a long list of possibilities. The appropriateness of each item on the list depends of course on the location and the type of and level of building activity in the area.

The time-honored method of finding jobs, the "help wanted" section of the local newspaper is an excellent resource.

Employers in building and related industries rely heavily on responses to such ads in filling their labor needs. Generally, ads are listed either simply by category or alphabetically by category. Although newspapers list job openings daily, the most comprehensive listings will generally appear in the Sunday edition, or in special employment supplements which are published periodically. "Help Wanted" ads enable placement staff to develop a list of employers to call, and also to gauge labor shortages.

Another way of introducing ex-offender placement programs to the home building employer community, is simply to flip through the Yellow Pages section of the telephone directory and note the various building, contracting, and supply firms. A quick call can

be all that is needed to establish an initial contact with a potential employer. Staff can follow up with a personal visit to explain the placement program and how hiring ex-offenders can benefit employers in the home building industry.

Many HBAs and BIAs will have an individual on staff or in the membership who keeps track of building starts in the area. Building start information can help identify potential employers and job leads. City and county permitting offices may also be able to supply this type of information. Again, a brief telephone call to the principals involved may be all that is needed to begin a relationship which will result in a regular supply of job openings for ex-offenders.

Another method of locating potential employers is to drive around the community and look for active building sites. Visiting these sites will not only help locate jobs, it will also give placement personnel a chance to learn about the industry in their communities and "develop a feel" for what is happening and where.

Developing a kind of intuitive sense for the target market through first

hand exposure is invaluable. Placement personnel do not need to swing a hammer on a worksite to develop this level of awareness; rather, becoming closely acquainted with worksite activities and norms through personal contact will pay immeasurable dividends.

Visiting local vocational and apprenticeship training programs may also result in solid job leads as well. It is possible to get a feel for placement, the process used by these organizations, and their understanding of employers' needs by a one-to-one visit.

Other places to look for actual job openings include:

- building industry publications and trade magazines
- employment agencies
- state employment service offices
- civil service announcements
- labor unions
- libraries and community centers
- online computer employment databases

In creating exposure for ex-offender placement programs and developing actual job leads, it is important to remember another fundamental

tenet of marketing: Sell the benefits of the program and not its features. Employers want to know what potential employees can do for them, what the benefits of hiring them are.

It is always nice if an employer can feel that he or she is "doing the right thing" by hiring ex-offenders, or can gain goodwill in the community, or can accomplish other altruistic intangibles. However, the critical issue for the employer is, can the potential employee do the job and do it in a way that will enhance the productivity and profitability of his or her business? In other words, sell the program not by focusing on what it consists of or how it operates (features), but by emphasizing what the program can do for the employer and his or her business (benefits). In a sense, features are passive: benefits are active. Active programs attract more attention and make a deeper impression.

The fact that a job placement program is one step in helping ex-offenders reintegrate into society is a feature. Employers, however, are more likely to take notice of the fact that ex-offend-

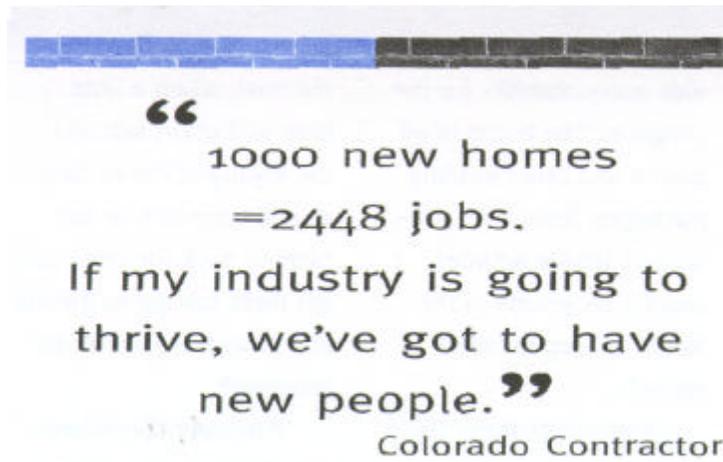
ers constitute an tremendous supply of ready labor. This is a benefit, one which will clearly help the employer further develop his or her business. This is the bottom line.

Other important benefits of ex-offender placement programs include:

- Worker Opportunity Tax Credits a program of the federal government which provides tax credits to employers for hiring qualified ex-offenders
- The Federal Bonding program provides fidelity bonding insurance coverage to ex-offenders at no cost to the employer
- On-the-job training reimbursement for employers
- Free labor source no advertising costs are incurred
- Probation and Parole status can offer employers assurance as to the candidates' continuity on the job.

### **POST-PLACEMENT FOLLOW-UP: WHY FOLLOW-UP ON PLACEMENTS?**

In the retail marketing environment, post sales follow-up is an extremely important part of any selling effort. Tracking numbers of units sold, deter-



mining the demographics of purchasers, knowing how many returns have been made and why, gauging the level of customer satisfaction, and other similar activities are all a part of post sales follow-up.

The information derived allows marketers to determine the effectiveness of their strategies and fine tune them if necessary, collect data for purposes of accountability and promotion, handle problems that have occurred and anticipate potential problems.

This same concept is also a part of the marketing approach to job placement for ex-offenders and for many of the same reasons.

Post-placement follow-up allows program administrators to track placements, and in so doing, collect data on employers contacted, the

numbers of ex-offenders placed, job retention rates, and other statistical information.

As in merchandise marketing, information gleaned through post-placement follow-up also allows program administrators to assess the effectiveness of the marketing plan and determine if any changes are called for due to market changes. Such information also provides the raw material for public relations efforts.

Another function of follow-up is to give placement staff opportunities to continue the interaction with both employees and employers. This ongoing support is important in cultivating relationships between the program and employers.

Each of these aspects of post-placement follow-up is examined below. Since public relations and

promotional activities can be of special importance to the success of placement programs, a later section of this manual is devoted specifically to these topics.

### **ASSESSMENT OF THE MARKETING PLAN**

In order to assess the effectiveness of the marketing plan and ensure that it "keeps up with the times," tracking of placements, both successful and unsuccessful ones, is essential. This part of post-placement follow-up is extremely important in making certain that the marketing plan is providing the highest possible level of service for the amount of time and money put into it.

Tracking placements is not difficult. The process can be reduced to a few simple questions that should be answered for each person placed. Where or how did the employer first hear about the placement program? Who referred the employer to the program if it was a referral? Why did the employer choose to go with the placement program instead of a more traditional employment service? Who was placed with the employer

and now did it work out?  
What particular jobs or tasks is the employee involved in?  
What is the pay scale and what are the upgrades experienced by the employee?

Analyzing the answers to these and similar questions can give administrators insights into how the marketing plan is functioning. Weak points in the plan, missed opportunities, errors in thinking, and incorrect assumptions made in developing the plan, can all come to light as a result of tracking placements.

Once a number of placements have been made and tracked, patterns may begin to appear in the data. These patterns should be interpreted carefully since they may indicate trends that could be extremely important. These trends are the natural "rhythm" of the job market in a given area and are particularly useful in pinpointing specific areas of the home building industry that are most promising or least promising for future placements.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY**

One important function that data collected through post-placement

follow-up serves is to provide accountability for the program. The terms of all grants and other funding packages, from both public and private sources, require recipients of the funds to keep detailed records.

Aside from these legal requirements, programs with proven track records, as evidenced by "good numbers," are much more likely to receive additional funding. This is always important, but even more so in times of limited funding and expanded public scrutiny.

### **CULTIVATING WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH EMPLOYERS**

As important as plan assessment, accountability, and public relations are, it can be argued that in marketing ex-offenders to the home building industry, the most important reason for post-placement follow-up is that it facilitates the development of long-term, productive relationships with employers. These are the type of relationships that result in repeat placements, referrals, and word-of-mouth publicity. Why place a handful of ex-offenders with an employer, and

then simply move on to the next, when a little time and effort will win the loyalty of the employer and keep him or her coming back for more and get them talking to friends and associates about the program?

Placement personnel can conduct post-placement calls on employers just as people in retail sales call on customers. Employers who have hired ex-offenders from the program can be visited to see how the employee is doing on the job, if there are any problems, and to assure the employer that placement staff are always available should problems arise.

Experience has shown that job retention is significantly affected by early and frequent follow-up. Visiting with the employer and the employee during the first week of work and again during subsequent weeks helps forestall problems, shows support for the employee, and keeps the dialogue between program personnel and the employer open and up-to-date. Even if a particular placement does not work out, in the long-run this kind of consistent follow-up can help retain the employer's confidence in

the placement program by letting him or her see that personnel are anxious to deal with problems in a timely manner.

Follow-up calls also give staff a convenient opportunity to check with employers to see if they have any additional labor needs, or if they have heard of any of their associates who might. Always remember the importance of referrals.

Follow-up calls will go a long way toward creating the goodwill that leads to strong, productive working relationships. Cultivating good relationships with employers however, is a process that requires much more than simple follow-up. Since these relationships are so important to the success of placement programs, the process by which they develop deserves further examination.

All relationships of course, begin with an initial contact. That, however, is not enough to ensure the development of a good working affiliation with an employer. Even repeated contacts in themselves are not enough to build the foundation for a positive, long-term relationship.

As we have seen, follow-up can also play an important role in building strong working relationships, but that also is only one part of the process.

The bottom line of successful relationship building is the development of trust between program administrators and staff and employers. That trust is built on four attributes:

- Mutuality
- Confidence
- Credibility
- Commitment

A brief examination of each of these points will clarify the importance and the process of relationship building and emphasize the role it plays in placement programs.

Recognizing mutuality is one of the keys to relationship building. Employers must be convinced that the placement program holds the solution to their problem of obtaining qualified labor, while placement program administrators will want to know that employers can solve the problem of obtaining employment for ex-offenders by providing jobs when needed.

Recognition of mutuality creates the customer-need-product-benefit relationship discussed earlier. If there is no mutuality there is no basis

for a relationship.

Mutuality alone may establish the basic connection, but it will not be enough to create the kind of solid, positive relationship that will sustain a placement program over the long-run.

Confidence is a crucial component. Even if a mutual need exists, both parties must be confident in the ability of the other to meet their respective needs adequately and consistently. Without that confidence, the relationship cannot progress beyond an "on-again-off-again" kind of association.

Without confidence, neither employers nor ex-offenders will reap the full potential benefit of the placement program.

Credibility is another ingredient in good relationships. Employers must see placement personnel as being credible. It is important that placement staffs know what they are talking about both in terms of the skills and abilities of ex-offenders they wish to place and the needs of the home building industry. The best way to establish credibility is to build a record of successful placements. Repeated successful placements foster credibility; repeated failures



destroy it.

The final building block of a good working relationship is commitment. Employers may see an ex-offender placement program as the perfect solution to their labor needs, but unless they believe that program administrators are totally committed to the program and to the employer-clients, they may not be inclined to rely heavily on the program. Again, in this case, neither employers nor ex-offenders will obtain the maximum benefit from the placement program.

The stronger the sense of mutuality in relationships, the higher the level of credibility, confidence, and commitment, the greater the degree of trust will be. This in turn will ensure positive, productive, long-term working relationships capable of providing maximum benefit to both ex-offenders and employers

The four points above

create the nucleus around which successful productive relationships form. Building the relationship is incremental, made up of regular, mundane, everyday, routine positive involvement with employers. While the daily mundane phone calls, thank you notes, or follow up visits may not seem critical or require special effort, they are nonetheless important.

These are the basics of a plan to market ex-offenders to the home building industry. This outline does not in any way purport to be a complete, off-the-shelf plan however.

Placement personnel should, as mentioned earlier, think of this as a template to use in designing a marketing plan and program that will reflect the resources of the institutions they serve, the realities of the building industry in their locales, and specific assets and liabilities of their ex-offender population.

# Tools for Planning and Implementation

The preceding section covers the requirements of a marketing plan proper and the specific needs of such a plan designed to enhance employment prospects in the home building industry for ex-offenders. This section will discuss briefly several things that may be included in a marketing plan, not as parts of the plan itself, but rather as tools which can be used in developing and implementing the plan.

## STAKEHOLDERS

### GROUP

One tool that can be of tremendous importance in almost every stage of developing and implementing a marketing plan for ex-offenders, is a "stakeholders" group. This is, simply, a core group of representatives from various organizations or agencies that interact, on whatever level, with inmates, ex-offenders and employers. Input and advice from such a group can be a critical element in identifying issues that need to be addressed and in determining how those

needs might be met.

Information garnered from these individuals, people who work daily out in the "real world" of work, can help ensure that the marketing plan addresses the realities of the job market and of the labor needs of home builder employers.

Examples of groups from which to seek representatives are correctional staff and administrators, pre-and post release services administrators and staff, job placement systems personnel, education providers, human resources organizations, and vocational/technical

training providers.

Other entities also having an interest in the welfare of ex-offenders or specifically in placement programs for them may be involved in the stakeholders group. These might include various departments or agencies of local and state governments, religious organizations, and the home building industry.

By providing accurate, up-to-date information and expertise from their respective fields, members of the stakeholders group can play a major role in the success or failure of a placement program.

Stakeholders may be formally organized, with committees and regular meetings, or such a group may be informally structured, with casual meetings scheduled only when it is felt necessary. It is also possible to simply poll or interview stakeholders by mail or telephone to get input and insights on issues of importance.

## BUDGETS

Budgets are essential in creating and operating any kind of program. A budget translates the mission and goals of a program into a systematic plan of operation expressed in dollars.

Budgets can help prevent overspending and waste by providing a means of monitoring and controlling expenditures. A realistic budget, consistent with the goals and strategy of the program it supports, can also be an invaluable planning and management tool, allowing resources to be allocated based on needs and priorities.

## FLOWCHARTS AND TIMETABLES

The flowchart concept can be a valuable tool in helping design and implement programs that are

process-based. Since placing ex-offenders in employment can certainly be thought of as a process, a flow chart can be of great benefit by visually linking the various elements of the program into a smoothly flowing chain of events. A well designed flowchart can reveal internal contradictions or gaps in service which could have an effect on placement success.

A timetable, which is simply a chronologically oriented flowchart, can provide simple, graphic insurance that various required services are provided to inmates or ex-offenders in the proper sequence and on schedule.

A timetable provides a means of keeping up with specific benchmarks or prerequisites and when they should be met. In other words, a timetable can facilitate tracking "who needs to do/get what and when."



## Support for Placement Programs

Funding for most ex-offender placement programs will generally come from regular government budget appropriations and/or through special grants from the federal government or private foundations and other non-profit organizations. Aside from direct financial support however, there are other forms of assistance which can be important adjuncts to the operation of these programs. This section will examine a few of the possibilities.



### WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAMS

Any opportunity to provide inmates or ex-offenders with work experience in residential construction should be taken. As discussed earlier, training in the home building industry is largely a matter of this kind of hands-on experience. Any amount of experience an ex-offender can gain will be a major factor in increasing an ex-offender's employability.

There are several avenues of approach in providing such training. Perhaps the most viable is through community based

organization such as the Habitat For Humanity Program, chapters of which are operating in major urban areas and many smaller cities and towns around the country.

This organization relies on donated materials and volunteer help to construct basic housing for low-income individuals and families.

These building projects require all levels of assistance, from helpers to experienced craftspeople. Even ex-offenders without particular trade skills can benefit from the simple fact of being exposed to a representative workplace, and seeing what goes into the construction of a home.

Habitat for Humanity, and similar groups, as well as city and county housing authorities, can become partners with ex-offender placement programs in creating these types of opportunities for ex-offenders.

### DONATION PROGRAMS

One of the "traditions" of the home building industry is that employees are usually expected to bring their own handtools to the worksite. For most, this does not represent a problem. Seasoned

workers will have a more than adequate selection of tools accumulated over the years. For ex-offenders seeking their first job in the industry however, obtaining even the most basic tools for employment can be a major obstacle.

Few ex-offenders can muster the resources to purchase tools required for the job. Even fewer correctional facilities have the funds to provide them as part of placement programs. While some employers do furnish tools, this is certainly the exception and not the rule. There are however, ways to provide tools to ex-offenders who wish to work in the industry at no expense to the ex-offender, the placement program, or the employer.

Developing a tool donation program is an excellent way to provide for this need. There are many options to explore in finding partners for a program of this sort. Often, major tool manufacturing companies will be willing to donate supplies of tools on a regular basis. Donations can be handled directly or coordinated by a local distributor or building materials retailer who handles the manufacturer's products.

Involving several partners in this kind of cooperative effort can help ensure a steady supply of tools.

Local distributors themselves may be interested in donating tools on an occasional basis. State or local HBAs or BIAs may also wish to participate in a tool donation program. Other trade associations, professional associations, or community agencies may see a program like this as a good opportunity for community involvement.

It should also be kept in mind that organizations or individuals who cannot donate tools directly may be willing to contribute funds which can be earmarked for the purchase of tools.

Also remember that this same concept can be applied to other items new employees in the industry may need, such as work clothing, safety glasses or boots.

### **MENTORING PROGRAMS**

Another important kind of support program is one involving volunteers who donate their time and expertise to mentor ex-offenders working in the building industry. Mentoring is a nurturing, cooperative relationship between a person having knowl-

edge and experience in a certain subject or field, and a less experienced individual who wants to learn the particular subject or field.

In the building industry specifically, a mentor can guide his or her partner in developing skills and good work habits. As coach, counselor, and protector, the mentor reinforces learning, nurtures confidence, helps the new worker formulate and meet career and personal goals, and assists him or her through the process of being initiated into the norms and culture of the worksite. Mentors can also provide companionship and advice on personal and work matters.

Mentorship programs have been shown effective in improving the job performance of mentees. Additionally, entry-level workers who have had the advantage of mentorship tend to go on to advanced training more often than those who have not been mentored.

Mentorship programs can be formal or informal, depending on the particular needs of those involved, and the number of volunteer mentors available. Developing partnerships with HBAs or BIAs or other trade associ-

ations, construction trades training institutions, and employers, can be the means of getting a mentorship program started and ensuring a supply of volunteer mentors.

These types of programs can be extremely important in providing support for ex-offender placement programs. Often, such programs may be the only way to supply materials or services needed to make programs more effective. The programs discussed here will meet very specific needs, but the concept of partnering placement programs with other programs, businesses, agencies, and services, can be developed to provide for a variety of program needs.

# Public Relations

Public relations holds a unique position in the marketing approach to creating employment opportunities for ex-offenders. Because of its nature, "PR" can play a major part in almost every aspect of a placement program.

In the final analysis, public relations is all about creating favorable exposure, exposure that will help enlist potential employers, create support in the community, make it easier to obtain funding and other material support, and generally create a favorable reputation for the placement program.

Although public relations is a tool, like budgets and flowcharts, it touches on so many factors in ex-offender placement programs, and plays such a vital role in their success, that it is treated separately in this section.

The skillful use of public relations can create untold opportunities for ex-offender placement programs. Aside from generating impor-

tant exposure on a day-to-day basis that helps create job leads, public relations can be used to foster goodwill in the home building industry and in the community at large. Public relations efforts can play a major role in the expansion of these programs by creating a broadest possible base of support for them.

In a sense, everything done to enhance the employability of ex-offenders is a public relations activity. Every five-minute telephone call made to explain the placement program, set up a job interview, organize a focus group, or enlist the support of a community agency, is a public relations move. Every program administrator who attends a board meeting of an HBA or BIA, speaks at

a city council meeting, or writes a letter to the editor about the placement program, is involved in public relations.

Another way to see public relations is as public education since, in reality, public relations efforts are used to educate the public. In this instance, the efforts are directed at educating the public on the issues involved in ex-offender employment: recidivism, rising incarceration costs, increased taxes, the expense of building new prisons, the shortage of labor in the home building industry, and other related issues. In essence, public relations is information management. It is a strategic, planned approach to managing information released to the public.

For ex-offender placement programs, strategic public relations sets the stage on which the program is seen by the public. The context of the program and its successes (and failures) is determined largely by whatever public relations efforts accompany it.

The benefits of a well-managed, integrated public relations effort include easy access to decision-makers to tell the program's story, better reception in the community for the placement program and its clients, increased employer and media goodwill, and reducing the impact of problems on the program.

The bottom line is that achieving a good reputation for ex-offender placement programs will allow the program to succeed in ways that are difficult to imagine. Programs that are well thought of may achieve a wider range of involvement and may have access to more and better resources than programs with a poor image. A well-regarded program will certainly face fewer obstacles in the community at large and in the home building industry community, both of which are of extreme importance.

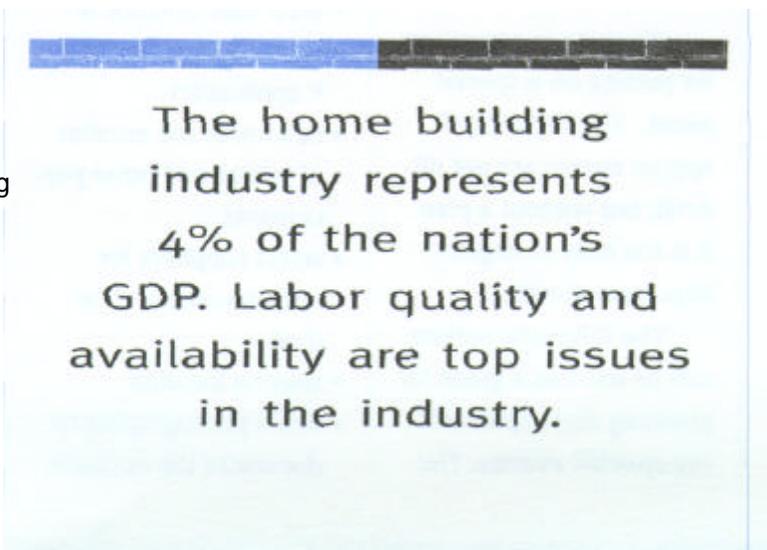
Un-managed or poorly managed public affairs however, can create an untenable situation for the program and for ex-offenders who participate in it. A bad reputation, one that can adversely affect the success of a placement program for years, can result from one simple mistake or indiscretion in releasing information. This issue of ex-offender placement revolves around a subset of many other issues, many of which are traditionally controversial. This must be kept in mind in operating and publicizing ex-offender placement programs.

The mechanics of public relations are relatively simple. There are a number of time-tested, accepted methods of implementing a public relations strategy.

- Create a single, short sentence, or perhaps a phrase, which captures the essence of what the placement program is all about. This phrase can serve as the core around which all public relations activities are built. As an example, the National Job Corps Coalition created an entire public relations campaign around the slogan: "The only national program for at-

risk youth with results that justify its costs." Of course everyone is familiar with the slogan successfully used by the United States Army for many years, "Be all that you can be!"

- Develop a procedure for creating and distributing press releases and other media notification tools. This should include the name or title of the per-



son who must approve such materials and at what point and how that person will be kept informed about developments that may require press notification. Press releases can be issued on a regular basis for general informational purposes, or to promote special events. Develop a list of contacts. A well organized up-to-date press list is a treasure. Contacts from

a wide range of media and other outlets should be maintained. Include radio and television stations, television networks, local cable access television stations, local, regional, and state newspapers, publications of local and state HBAs and BIAs, minority or ethnic newspapers, newsletters and social service and other

- Develop a one-page fact sheet that summarizes the placement program. This fact sheet can be based on the sentence or phrase discussed earlier in this list. Include as well a brief history of the program and specific information about its operation and successes. This can serve as a standard press release and can also provide

talking points for presentations, an enclosure for whatever information packets might be developed, and as a flyer for distribution to potential employers or other program supporters.

- Issue press releases at every possible opportunity. Never let the press or the public forget about the existence of the placement program. Almost any milestone, event, or success can provide a chance to promote the program. Keep in mind the cardinal rules of writing press releases. As well as the traditional "who, what, when, where, and how" of press releases, keep the following in mind when writing them: be specific, be clear, be positive, use present tense, keep it simple, and know the audience at which the release is being directed. More tips on writing press materials are given later in this manual.

It is especially important to publicize special events connected with the program. Successful marketing of ex-offenders capitalizes on these types of happenings. Special events give program

administrators an opportunity to invite special speakers to the local community, recognize individuals who work with the program, showcase placement efforts and successes, honor the contributions of employers, donors, staff persons, and others who have made significant contributions in support of the program.

Speakers for special events can be obtained from correctional facility administration, local, state, or the national government. Heads or members of HBAs or BIAs, business owners, vocational school representatives would also make appropriate speakers. The list of potential

speakers for special events is endless as are the "themes" around which a special event may be structured. Here is where imagination and "brainstorming" can really pay off.

Special events should also be considered as visual opportunities as well. In planning for your event, be sure to consider the "photo ops" for both newspapers and television.

Planning is everything for putting on a special event. The logistics of special events are not difficult, but without a plan, it is too easy to neglect important details.

The following outline can be used as a guide for planning and implementing **special events**. The nature and complexity of

the event will dictate the specifics of what you do, but these pointers will serve as a place to begin.

### THREE TO SIX MONTHS IN ADVANCE:

- determine the nature of the event, set the "theme"
- develop a budget and determine funding sources
- set a date (include an alternate or "rain date" if applicable)
- determine the number of guests and other participants
- select suppliers for refreshments and/or food
- select a location
- hire a photographer to document the occasion

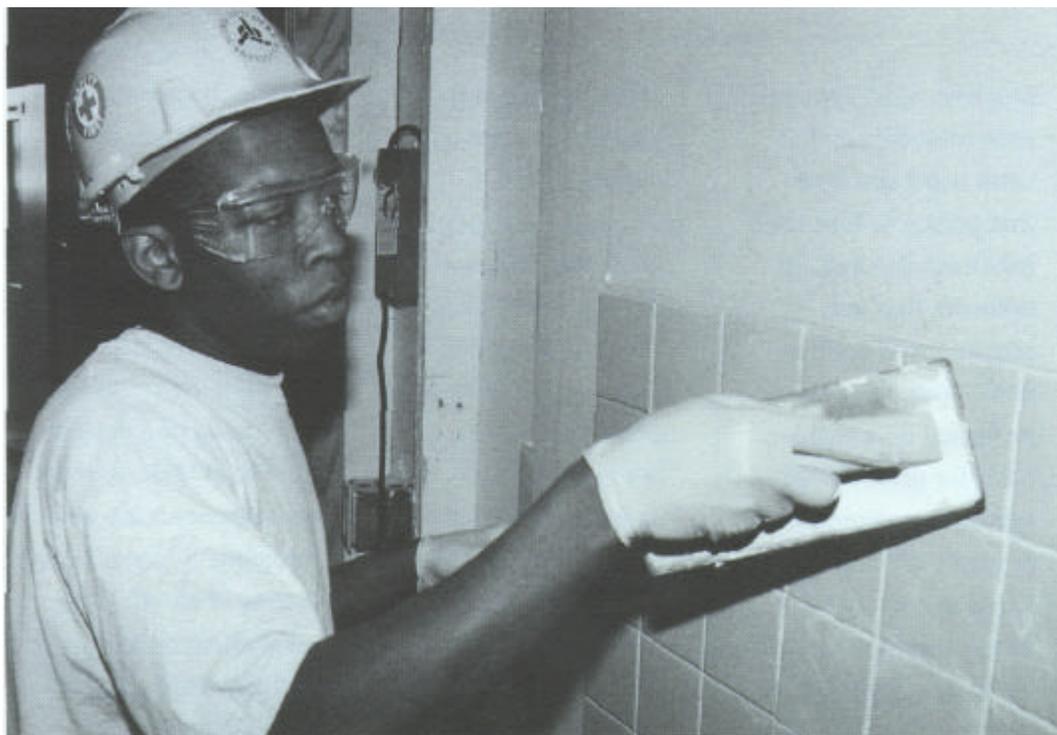
- be clear on who is responsible for insurance security parking advance PR

### TWO TO THREE MONTHS IN ADVANCE:

- draw up guest lists, supply list to security coordinator if necessary
- formally invite speakers
- create press kits if necessary
- create invitations, agendas, talking points for speakers, and any needed handouts
- create any displays needed or mockups of them
- visit location, check electrical supply, chairs, tables, entrances/exits, handicapped access, security, set-up/knock-down space, traffic flow, etc.

### ONE MONTH IN ADVANCE

- mail invitations
- confirm speakers, send them talking points, agendas, maps, parking information, etc.
- finalize arrangements for refreshment vendors, caterers, etc.
- write and send press releases or press kits
- hire and check out audio-visual equipment
- check electrical supply and arrange for exten-



sion cords, outlet adapters, etc.

### **ONE WEEK IN ADVANCE:**

- determine accurate guest count
- follow up on speakers for final confirmation
- make alphabetized guest and media lists
- prepare name tags needed
- prepare any awards, citations, and certificates needed
- send final alert, including guest list to media assignment editors
- assign staff duties, especially for cleanup, alert security to who will be doing what and where they will access
- preview audio-visual setup
- arrange for early access by vendors, audio-visual operators, media, etc.

### **ONE DAY AHEAD:**

- make final calls to media
- check setup of chairs, tables, lights, etc.
- create signs to direct guests to parking, assembly areas, platform, etc.
- prepare handouts, certificates, awards, etc.
- check with security on access, parking, etc.
- purchase soft-goods needed such as napkins, table covers, etc.

### **THE DAY OF THE EVENT:**

- personally check setup, traffic flow, restrooms, test audio-visual equipment
- assemble guest list, name tags, handouts, etc. at the site
- assign staff to greet and escort guests, speakers as needed
- put directional, informational signs in place
- ensure that restrooms are open and accessible
- greet speakers, guests, speakers personally as possible
- introduce speakers, special guests, and other program participants to each other

### **EVENT FOLLOW-UP:**

- pay bills
- place stories with media, send follow-up press releases where appropriate
- send thank-you notes to speakers and organizations, include mention of any media coverage that occurred
- send thank-you notes to staff that contributed time and effort to the event

Special events do not have to be large or expensive. Many times, businesses and individuals will be happy to donate materials, funds, or ser-

“As a business man, my one goal is to make a profit. One of my raw materials is workers. It's not the cost of the raw material but the efficiency I can make of that material that is important to me.”

Builder & NAHB Board Member

vices to help defray the expense. Locations for events may also be available free of charge or at least very inexpensively from religious organizations or businesses. Most city and county governments have assembly rooms or other spaces which can be reserved in advance and used for special events. The support available to help successfully "bring off" a special event is limited only by the imagination and perseverance of those in charge of planning it.

### **TIPS FOR PREPARING PRESS RELEASES AND FACT SHEETS**

In writing press releases, the "inverted pyramid" style of writing should be used. The first paragraph, commonly called the

"lead," consists of a brief summary of the major facts of the story. This enables readers to decide quickly whether they wish to read the remainder of the story. This paragraph should contain the traditional "who, what, when, where, and how" of journalistic writing and should be written in such a way as to grab the reader's attention immediately.

Each succeeding paragraph should contain information of descending importance in telling the story. Paragraphs should begin with a topic sentence, one that briefly introduces the main focus of the paragraph. Use familiar, simple words and short sentences and never use jargon or specialized lan-

guage unless absolutely necessary. If jargon is unavoidable, always include an explanation of terms used.

Use the active voice in writing. This makes writing more interesting and creates a feeling of immediacy. Instead of writing "Fred was employed by the ABC Construction Company starting in 1998," write "Fred has been working for the ABC Construction Company since 1998." A clue to spotting passive constructions in writing is the use of "was" and "were." These words signal use of the passive voice.

Always be completely accurate and objective. If necessary, verify facts and figures several times before including them in a story. Do not include irrelevant information. This makes it easier for the reader to get through the story and end up with the basic information the piece is intended to convey.

Use quotes when possible; they add interest to the story and will liven it up. Always identify the individual being quoted by name and title, and be CERTAIN to quote them verbatim. Few things are more irritating

or can create ill-will more quickly than to be misquoted in the press.

Be sure to include information about the person or persons who are to be considered contact persons, including telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address if applicable. If the press release runs longer than one page, put the indication "MORE" at the bottom of each page (centered) to alert the reader that the story continues.

Fact sheets are simply one or two page summaries of a program, event, or issue, which present the basic facts involved. These can be written in list style or in narrative style. The same points made in reference to writing press releases with clarity and directness also apply to preparing fact sheets.

Use short, to-the-point sentences written in the active voice. Avoid jargon by using familiar, simple words. Be accurate with the facts and do not over-write; keep it simple and basic. Think of the fact sheet as a sketch of the issue involved: the bare-bones information needed to inform an interested reader.

Be sure to include the most important facts

about the event, program, or issue being addressed and be specific. Do not write that "There were lots of inmates released last year, most of whom did not find employment." Instead write, "Last year our facility released 245 inmates, only 56 percent of whom found employment." Remember it is a fact sheet, not a generalities sheet.

Since fact sheets are useful for so many purposes, it may be desirable to keep quantities of them on hand so they will be available when needed. However, remember that since the facts and figures they contain may be subject to change, it is necessary to update them regularly. The only thing more useless than no fact sheet is a fact sheet with "stale" data.

# Summary

One of the most innovative of those ways is to take a marketing approach to ex-offender employment, and to direct those marketing efforts to employers in the residential and light commercial construction industry. Chronic labor shortages and the nature of training and work in this industry make it an excellent niche in the job market to fill with ex-offenders. Seldom have a problem and a solution been so perfectly matched as in this type of placement program.

A well-constructed marketing plan, based on careful research into the needs of the building industry and the skills and capabilities of ex-offenders, is the foundation of any such marketing effort. Implementation of the marketing plan will create opportunities for introducing ex-offenders into the targeted job market by making the benefits of hiring them obvious to employers. This is a cutting-edge approach to dealing with job development and placement for ex-offenders.

The Home Builders Institute, and the Colorado Department of Corrections, know well the difficulties, and the rewards, of administering

It is obvious that providing ex-offenders with living-wage employment can be an important tool in helping them build new lives. This, in turn, is a major factor in breaking the cycle of events that leads to recidivism. Although ex-offenders face many barriers in finding meaningful employment, there are ways to go about reducing these barriers, and increasing their employment opportunities.



readily accessible to ex-offenders seeking meaningful employment. Employers in this industry are building homes and communities, and can help the corrections system rebuild lives as well.

these types of placement programs. Through long experience in operating corrections-based placement programs, HBI has seen first-hand the positive effect on individuals and on society at large that have resulted.

The Home Builders Institute, along with the Colorado Department of Corrections, invites other

correctional facility staffs to look at the concepts presented here, and consider how they might be put to work to make a difference in their own cities and states.

The home building industry is a large and pervasive one, and constitutes a varied and active segment of the job market today, a segment that is

## HOME BUILDING INDUSTRY

### National Association of Home Builders

15th and M Streets NW  
Washington, DC 20005  
1-800-368-5242

*Largest trade association for the residential and light commercial construction industrial, source for state and local HBA information, research on housing issues, labor shortages and demands, building industry development.*

### Home Builders Institute

1090 Vermont Avenue  
Suite 600,  
Washington, DC 20005  
1-800-795-7955

*HBI is the educational arm of the National Association of Home Builders. HBI develops and distributes curricula for preapprenticeship and apprenticeship programs and literacy/numeracy teaching programs, operates training programs for targeted populations including CRAFT (Community, Restitution, Apprenticeship, Focused Training) and TRADE (Training, Restitu-*

*tion, Apprenticeship Development Education) which target correctional populations, provides technical assistance to educational, correctional, and home building institutions.*

### Associated General Contractors

1957 E Street NW  
Washington, DC 20006  
1-800-242-1766

*Source for local chapter information and publications.*

### Associated Builders and Contractors

1300 N. 17th Street  
Rosslyn, VA 22208  
(703) 812-2000

*Source for local chapter information and publications.*

### Job Corps

1-800-733-JOBS

*Competency-based trades training and educational programming for 16-24 year olds. 112 Job Corps Centers in 46 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Some Centers offer advanced training as well.*

### National Association of Women in Construction

327 South Adams Street  
Ft. Worth, TX 76104-1081  
(817) 877-5551  
FAX (817) 877-0324

*Professional association, education programs, scholarships.*

### Women in Non-Traditional Employment Roles (WINTER)

PO Box 90511  
Long Beach, CA  
90809-0511  
(310) 590-2266

*Provides technical assistance to unions, contractors, and apprenticeship programs to help meet goals for involving women, job counseling, job search assistance, referrals, workshops.*

### CORRECTIONAL/ADULT EDUCATION

#### Office of Correctional Education

Division of National Programs

Office of Vocational and Adult Education

U. S. Department of Education

400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Switzer Building Room 4529  
Washington, DC 20202-7242  
(202) 205-5621  
FAX (202) 401-2615

*Information regarding funding opportunities current research in the field, the OCE News, correctional education library, demonstration projects.*

### Correctional Education Association

4380 Forbes Blvd.  
Lanham, MD 20706  
1-800-783-1232

*Affiliate of American Correctional Association, provides services to students in correctional settings.*

### Corrections Education Research Center

University of Minnesota  
325 Vo Tech Ed Bldg.  
1954 Buford Avenue St.  
Paul, MN 55108 (612)  
624-3010

*Studies effectiveness and improvement of correctional education programs, determination of what are considered best practices in correctional education.*

### National Center for Research in Vocational Education

Suite 500  
2030 Addison St. #1674  
Berkeley, CA 94720-1674  
1-800-762-4093  
FAX (510) 642-2124

*Nation's largest center for research and development*

*in work-related education, newsletters, programs, projects.*

**Association for Career and Technical Education**

1410 King Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
1-800-826-9972  
FAX (703) 683-7424

*Dedicated to advancement of vocational education, works with educators, trade associations, employers to promote vocational education.*

**American Association for Adult and Continuing Education**

1200 19th Street NW  
Suite 300  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 857-1881  
FAX (202) 857-1104

*Provides services for adult/continuing educators, conferences, seminars, publications, instructional communications, funding information.*

**Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc**

635 James Street  
Syracuse, NY 13203-2214  
(315) 472-0001  
FAX (315) 472-0002

*national, non-profit organization which delivers one-on-one and small group literacy tutoring services at no charge to the student.*

**National Institute for Literacy**

800 Connecticut Ave. NW  
Suite 200  
Washington, DC  
20006-2712  
(202) 632-1500  
FAX (202) 632-1512

*Promotes public awareness about literacy, develops standards, formulates policies, hotline and clearinghouse, provides information, fosters collaboration.*

**CORRECTIONS**

**National Criminal Justice Reference Service**

PO Box 6000  
Rockville, MD 20849-6000  
1-800-851-3420

*National source for statistics and publications, operates office of Criminal justice Programs (301) 519-5500, population and incident profiles, statistics, information on procedures and programs, publications.*

**National Institute of Corrections**

Office of Correctional Job Training and Placement  
320 First Street NW,  
Washington, DC 20534  
(202) 307-3106, ext. 147

*Information center research, reports on correctional placement programs, publications.*

**American Probation and Parole Association**

c/o The Council of State Governments  
Iron Works Pike  
PO Box 11910  
Lexington, KY 40579-1910  
(502) 244-8203

*Education and training programs for professionals in the field, development of standards, conferences and seminars.*

**American Jail Association**

2053 Day Road,  
Suite 100,  
Hagerstown, MD 21740-9795  
(301) 790-3930  
FAX (301) 790-2941

*Provides support for those working in and operating the nation's jails, training, bimonthly magazine American Jails, operations*

*bulletin, video training tapes, assistance in finding products and services.*

**American Correctional Association**

4380 Forbes Blvd.  
Lanham, MD 20706-4322  
1-800-222-5646

*Professional organization, publications, seminars and conferences, training, technical assistance, accreditation, Corrections Today magazine.*

**National Center on Institutions and Alternatives**

3125 Mt. Vernon Avenue  
Alexandria, VA 22305  
(703) 684-0373  
FAX (703) 684-6037

*Research, publications, community-based alternatives, alternative sentencing.*



Home Builders Institute

*The educational arm of the National Association of Home Builders*

1090 Vermont Avenue

Suite 600

Washington, DC 20005

1-800-795-7955