**Gap Analysis for the National Criminal Justice Reform Project (Phase III)**

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**Gap Analysis Overview**

This document describes a gap analysis performed by Raven Simonds and Jacob Young of the Center for Correctional Solutions at Arizona State University for the NCJRP Phase III Evaluation of the Second Chance Center at the Arizona State Prison Complex Lewis, Eaglepoint Unit (hereafter, SCCL or “the center”). The gap analysis has two goals: 1) a taking stock of what data are currently being collected by the Arizona Department of Corrections Rehabilitation and Reentry (ADCRR) and the Department of Economic Security (DES) about center participants as gleaned from team meetings and review of the SCCL program description and 2) identifying what additional data and information would need to be collected to empirically evaluate the impact of the center on successful reentry outcomes (e.g. employment, recidivism). The gap analysis is structured as a process flow, examining data collection and gaps in three sequential intervals: prior to entering the center, while an individual is at the center, and after the individual leaves the center (See Figure 1). The overarching purpose of the center is to assist medium to high risk individuals prepare for release by providing them with programs and classes that will help with job attainment, securing housing, and accessing services within the community. This gap analysis seeks to identify what is needed to determine whether the center is meeting its purpose.

**Selection and Participation in the Center**

Prior to the pausing of individuals entering SCCL due to COVID-19, individuals would be invited to move to the center as space was available. This involved going through a roster of eligible individuals and asking them if they would like to move to the center. The criteria for eligibility are:

* Individual is approximately 80 days from release
* Minimum and medium custody inmates (who are eligible for an override to minimum)
* Housed in General Population
* No felony detainers or felony holds
* No more than 90 days to release
* Not assigned to a fire Crew, Treatment counseling program, Arizona Correctional Industries (ACI) or career & technology education program
* No pending disciplinary violations
* Inmate agrees to participate in program

This list of eligible individuals is generated automatically by the Arizona Correctional Information System (ACIS) and a Correctional Officer III (COIII) then contacts individuals on the list to inquire about their preference for participation.

Gap: It is unclear why eligible individuals decline participation in the center. Prior to ADCRR’s movement to a new data management system, a variable was created to measure why individuals chose not to go to the center. It is not clear whether these data are still being collected. Overall however, a lack of understanding of why eligible individuals decline the center is problematic because individuals who *volunteer* to participate may substantively differ from those who decline. As a consequence, inferences about the effect of the center on job attainment, securing housing, and accessing services within the community may be biased.

Solution: To minimize biases that might emerge in the decision process, we recommend a two-stage randomization procedure for assigning eligible individuals to the center. In the first stage, individuals who are eligible to participate in the center (according to the criteria specified above) would be randomly selected to volunteer. These individuals would then indicate their willingness to move to the center. In the second stage, individuals would be randomly selected from the group of willing and eligible individuals. This will generate two comparison groups: those who were eligible, but could not volunteer and those who indicated that they would move, but then were not selected. This design is increasingly common in medical trials where the goal is to address the profound biases that are introduced by volunteers and treatment non-compliance. We understand that there may be a concern with privileging research over practical needs of the center. Specifically, the ethical issue of individuals who indicated a preference for participation, but were not selected as well as prioritizing keeping the center at capacity. But, we believe randomization is the best way to clearly identify the effects of the center on individuals.

**Center Activities**

*8-Week Department of Economic Security Cycle*

Individuals are required to participate in an 8-week program provided by DES. This 8-week activity cycle is heavily focused on preparing for the job market. Topics include resume development, mock interviews, computer and soft skills training, and building confidence. Towards the end of their 8-week cycle, individuals participate in job fairs with local employers, with some receiving job referrals and offers.

Gap: Currently there is no way to quantify whether this program influences job attainment. Specifically, because there is no variation in the activity cycle (i.e., participants either complete the program or exit the center), the only comparisons that can be made are to individuals who *do not* participate in the center. This comparison is problematic for reasons mentioned in the prior gap. Since there is no variability in the economic security cycle, center participants cannot be compared to each other with regard to outcomes like jobs after release are being collected (see more on this below). There is currently no way to examine how differences in the 8-week program may influence these post release employment outcomes.

Solution: Each week of the cycle needs a tool for measuring what an individual is supposed to learn from that cycle component. The assessment can take various forms, but the most feasible option may be to have the DES representative make some evaluation of the individual’s performance, skill development, etc.

*Arizona Department of Rehabilitation and Reentry Programs and Classes*

Individuals also can participate in a variety of programs and classes offered by ADCRR. These classes are voluntary and span a variety of topics such as money management, family ties, and landscaping. Participation in these classes is well-documented (i.e., who took which class, whether or not the class was completed, if a certificate was earned).

Gap: First, there is currently no fidelity instrument for assessing whether these programs and classes are effective or if individuals are learning. Existing measurement is limited to participation in the course, not an assessment of learning objectives. Second, some of these programs lack a clear reason for their implementation and seem to reflect what is available at the time, not necessarily the goals of the center (i.e. job attainment, securing housing, and accessing services within the community). Third, since program participation is voluntary, there is unmeasured confounding in that individuals who take more classes may be different in some way compared to those who do not take classes. Put differently, if we observe that individuals who took more classes have better post-release outcomes we cannot attribute the difference to the courses, as individuals do not randomly select into the programs. Fourth, there is no information collected on individuals’ experiences in the center. In other words, there is no mechanism for feedback about whether one feels more prepared for release.

Solution: Each program needs a tool for measuring what an individual is supposed to learn from that program. Additionally, it should be decided whether programs that are not aligned with the goals of the center should be removed and replaced with programs that are more aligned with the center goals. To address selection into programs, a randomization component should be introduced to assess the effectiveness of individual courses. Finally, entrance and exit interviews that evaluate the individual’s preparedness for release should be conducted to determine whether the center, from the individual’s perspective, is effective at achieving the desired goals.

**Post-Release Outcomes**

*Recidivism*

Recidivism is currently measured by returns to ADCRR custody. These data are generated in weekly reports.

Gap: No other information is currently being collected on other types of contact with either the police or the court. This gives us a limited perspective on what types of behaviors or activities participants are engaging in post-release.

Solution: Collect data from other agencies that provide more immediate feedback about the effectiveness of the center.

*Employment*

DES measures employment two ways. The first is through the state employment system, as the DES is able to measure participants’ first employment after leaving the center, as well as the total number of jobs the individual has obtained post-release. The second is through Employment Counselors who make attempts to follow-up with clients at 30, 60, and 90 days post-release.

Gap: There is no information collected on what jobs people held prior to their incarceration. So, it is not clear whether individuals may be returning to a past job, which may bias interpreting effects of the center.

Solution: Collect data from participants on their prior employment and experiences using a survey when individuals begin their orientation to the center.

**Gap Analysis Summary**

The overarching purpose of the center is to assist individuals in preparing for release from prison by providing them with programs and classes that will help with job attainment, securing housing, and accessing services within the community. This analysis has sought to identify the gaps that currently exist in seeking to evaluate the effectiveness of the center. Additionally, potential solutions to those gaps have been proposed. We have articulated these solutions with the goal of generating the most unbiased estimates of the causal effect of the Second Chance Center Lewis. More importantly, we have articulated these solutions to produce a rigorous research assessment that can enhance the programming at the Center beyond its strong foundation.

