

College in Jail Toolkit:

How to Build a Successful Partnership
Between a Sheriff's Department and a
Community College

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Introduction

This toolkit is designed to assist California’s community colleges and Sheriff’s Departments as they build partnerships to provide college education inside county jails. There are thousands of potential students in our 58 county jail systems who can be served through these partnerships, as approximately 75,000 Californians are in jail on any given day¹ and nearly 90% are incarcerated within 10 miles of a community college.² Moreover, these partnerships make sense: higher education reduces recidivism, changes lives, and builds stronger communities.

The recommendations in this toolkit are based on site visits and interviews with colleges, Sheriff’s Departments, and students throughout the state.

Why Develop a Partnership?

Partnerships between community colleges and Sheriff’s Departments can be mutually beneficial. The college is able to reach students who are incarcerated and cannot come to campus; the Sheriff’s Department is able to provide programming that can reduce recidivism. The colleges can offer the same classes in the jail as those offered on campus, including developmental or remedial education, career technical education (CTE), and traditional full-credit college degree courses such as English and math. They can also offer short “introduction to college” or study skills courses. In general, a few classes or a particular credential pathway will be selected; the college will determine the courses and curriculum to be offered after determining the needs

of the Sheriff and the students. Community colleges are funded through per-student apportionment, which means that they can cover the cost of faculty if the class is sufficiently large. The Sheriff provides the students and space in which the classes can take place. There are added costs that must be addressed as these programs grow, including additional staffing on both sides, textbooks, and student supplies. However, because these partnerships fit within the missions of both the public colleges and the Sheriff’s Departments, extra costs are less than they would be if either side was covering the full cost.

California Jails

A jail is a correctional facility run by the county Sheriff. Each county has its own jail system; a county can have one or multiple jails, depending on its size. Jails are funded by local and state funds but decisions about the jail are made at the county level, generally by the Sheriff in conjunction with county executive leadership.³ Budgeting, staffing, and allocation of programming or classroom space are all local decisions, made by the Sheriff. Prisons differ from jails. They are run by the state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, with relatively little local control.

County jails hold individuals who have not yet been sentenced, as well as individuals who have been sentenced to jail. If someone is not able to make bail, they will stay in the county jail until they are sentenced, at which point they may remain in jail, be moved because they have been sentenced to prison, or be released if their time is served or if they are sentenced to probation. This means that a college teaching in jail may interact with individuals awaiting trial as well as individuals sentenced for misdemeanors, infractions, or lower-level felony offenses. It also means that students may leave with little or no notice if they are sentenced to prison or released. The average length of stay for an individual incarcerated in a county jail is much shorter than that of an individual incarcerated in a state prison. The maximum county jail sentence used to be one year but after the passage of Public Safety Realignment (AB 109) in 2011, jails have no maximum sentence.⁴ This means that the average length of stay has increased since 2011, although it is still much shorter than the average length of a prison stay.⁵ In addition, Realignment changed the type of convictions for those sentenced to jail.

California Community Colleges

California has 114 community colleges throughout the state. They offer associate degrees and CTE in more than 175 fields.⁶ By state mandate, CTE programs in California's community colleges must match regional labor market needs. The colleges are organized into 72 districts, and a college cannot offer courses outside of its district. This means that a jail and a college must be situated within the same community college district in order for the college to offer courses in the jail. Most budgeting and staffing decisions are made at the college level or, sometimes, the district level.

Community colleges are “open access,” meaning that anyone with a high school diploma or equivalency may enroll. The colleges also accept anyone over 18 years of age who can benefit from instruction even if they do not have a diploma or equivalent, although students without a high school diploma or equivalent are generally required to take an assessment test prior to enrollment. All low-income Californians are eligible for a statewide tuition fee waiver (the California College Promise Grant), even those who are incarcerated in jail or prison.

Essential Elements and Best Practices

Essential Elements



Make the Right Match

- **Use community college district lines:** More than one community college district may be serving a county, and community college districts lines often do not coincide with county lines. If the county has multiple jails, the different jails may be in different community college districts. Check district lines before establishing a partnership. A map of [district boundaries is found here](#).⁷
- **Start with a conversation:** Organize a meeting between the college and Sheriff's Department to discuss both sides' needs. Does the jail have enough eligible students? Does it have classroom space? Does the college have faculty willing to teach during the hours the jail can provide space for programming? Are both institutions willing to lend staff and other resources to make the partnership effective?
- **Choose a point person from each institution:** If a partnership seems viable, designate one individual from both the college and the Sheriff's Department as the main points of contact for the program. Typically, the point person at the jail will be its education coordinator or programs/rehabilitation director. At the college, the point person often comes from Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) or Adult Education and may be an outreach specialist, program director, or inmate education coordinator.



Match Programming with Jail Demographics

- **Account for shorter lengths of stay:** The average length of stay in a county jail varies by conviction and county, but can be as short as one month. Average

length of stay and population trends will dictate the length and type of courses the college can offer, as will the county's jail policies. Some counties will be able to bring together those who are staying longer, others will not. Colleges currently teaching in jail offer courses ranging from one to 15 weeks.

- **Identify the educational needs:** Jails are comprised of diverse populations and each county's jail population differs. Work together to assess the jail's population. If possible, determine how many people in the jail have a high school diploma or equivalent, how many speak English as a second language, and how many have partial college credits. Answers to these questions will help determine what programming is most needed in the facility.
- **Align programming with conviction patterns:** If your jail and college reside in a community with consistent conviction trends, consider using those patterns to shape programming.



Formalize the Partnership

- **Sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):** An MOU establishes the operational framework for your partnership and identifies both parties' roles and responsibilities. It also builds a partnership that can endure staff changes. The MOU should detail larger issues such as the timeline for scheduling courses and credential pathways, as well as smaller details such as which party is responsible for supplying papers and pencils for student use.
- **Develop a strategic plan:** Work together to determine the vision for the program. The strategic plan can be as extensive or simple as the parties choose, but should include both parties' desired outcomes.



Prepare to Compromise

- **Respect role differences:** The colleges' job is to educate whereas the jails' job is to provide safety and security. Each side must recognize that the other operates within a separate regulatory structure with different budgeting, union, and structure pressures. For example, most community colleges require a minimum number of students per course. That number generally cannot be negotiated unless the Sheriff is able to cover all costs including faculty salaries. Likewise, the jail is required to conduct background checks on all college faculty and staff entering the facility; these checks cannot be negotiated which means that last minute faculty changes are generally not an option.
- **Be flexible about scheduling:** Jails need programming year-round while colleges run on semesters. This can make scheduling feel complicated for both parties. Most jails are accustomed to fitting many competing providers into limited time and space. Time and space are at a premium in most jails. Meanwhile, colleges likely have restrictions around the hours when faculty are available to teach. Faculty contracts generally include breaks between semesters. In the face of these scheduling conflicts, both parties should be upfront about their limitations and needs.



Create a College Experience in Jail

- **Locate suitable classroom space:** Though programming space is a commodity in most county jails, a college needs sufficient room to run a class when teaching inside. A sufficient classroom has desks and basic materials like notebooks, pencils, books, and a blackboard.
- **Develop a resource library:** Certain college classes require research components, which can cause unique challenges for incarcerated students without computers or a complete library. Colleges and Sheriff's Departments who have already build partnerships are finding creative solutions, such as bringing in a set of

materials for the duration of a particular course that can be used by students as a short-term library.

- **Realize the potential of all students:** Incarcerated students can outperform students on campus, and opening their minds to college can mean the difference between changing their lives and returning to jail after release. Do not limit jail offerings to non-credit or remedial classes. If full-credit degree-track college courses aren't feasible, incorporate information sessions and build a bridge between the jail and the college campus so that jail students can continue their education after release. If possible, invite formerly incarcerated students and graduates to come into the jail and share how college has positively impacted their lives and what resources are available on campus upon release.

Best Practices



Maintain Regular Communication

- **Host monthly provider meetings:** Build in time for problem solving, as challenges will arise on a regular basis. Monthly meetings provide the time and space for partners to address concerns, questions, suggestions, and funding.
- **Maintain an updated MOU:** The MOU should reflect the current reality of the program. Be prepared to amend the MOU on a yearly or bi-yearly basis.
- **Keep leadership informed:** As the program develops and grows, keep both college and Sheriff's Department leadership informed of its progress. Many programs summarize takeaways from the monthly providers meeting and share with supervisors from both entities. Additionally, including leadership in celebrations and recognition ceremonies can go a long way in demonstrating the effectiveness of the partnership.



Access Diverse Funding

- **Tap into multiple funding streams:** Both the college and the Sheriff will carry extra costs for these partnerships, mostly through staff time but also for textbooks and other supplies. Each partnership covers these expenses differently, but many use a combination of funds including the Inmate Welfare Fund (jail), Equity (college), Basic Skills (college), Associated Student fees and Student Success and Support Program (college), Realignment (county criminal justice) and Adult Education Block Grant (adult education).
- **Join the local AB 104 Consortium:** AB 104 consortia make funding decisions regarding the allocation of local Adult Education Block Grant funds. Having both the college and the Sheriff's Department attend consortium meetings means having two advocates for the partnership. Incarcerated college students may not be on the consortium's radar, so flag them as a group in need of funding.



Build a Pathway to Campus

- **Identify enrolled students who are nearing release:** Most jail students will either be released or transferred to a state prison. For those being released, it can be helpful to check in with them close to their release dates to determine whether they would like to continue their education on campus. Ask students where they will be staying; they may be closer to a different college after release.
- **Implement discharge planning:** If a student wants to continue his/her education on campus, college staff should prepare a transition plan for the student. This plan might include a scheduled campus tour with enrollment assistance, information on enrollment and financial aid, and guidance about Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS) and EOPS processes. Facilitate connections with the receiving campus. [This directory](#)⁸ lists the colleges and universities in California with programs and student clubs for formerly incarcerated students.



Reward Achievement and Celebrate Student Success

- **Host recognition ceremonies:** After the completion of a semester or segment, host a recognition ceremony to reward students' hard work. Award students with recognition certificates. If possible, invite students' loved ones to attend.
- **Ask leadership to speak at key events:** College and Sheriff's Department leadership can be invited to these events. Ask one leader from each partner – such as the college President and Sheriff - to share motivating remarks at the ceremony.



Promote Cultural Competence

- **Hire Formerly Incarcerated People:** Formerly incarcerated staff members who have successfully transformed their lives through education and other programs can serve as positive role models for students. They often provide the most effective models of mentorship and bring specialized knowledge that can help students navigate their transition from corrections to campus.
- **Introduce the College Experience:** Many enrolled students will have limited or no prior experience with college, so be prepared to provide these students with introductory information on the college experience. All students should be introduced to the expectations of course work and classroom conduct from the college. This introductory work can take place during an orientation prior to the beginning of the semester.

▶ Tips and Recommendations

For Community Colleges



Hire and Support Program Staff and Faculty

- **Hire dedicated program staff:** Most successful programs have one or two dedicated staff members on campus. These program staff can devote the time and resources needed to get a program up and running, and can be a point of contact to address challenges before they derail a partnership. These staff members can be responsible for coordinating programming in the jail, as well as facilitating recently released students' transition from jail to campus. Colleges use a variety of funding streams to support these positions.
- **Support staff and faculty:** Working in a correctional facility is fulfilling but comes with its own unique challenges. Carefully vet faculty and staff before sending them into the jail; avoid assigning anyone who cannot be flexible and who cannot respect the jail's need to prioritize safety and security. Never require anyone to work or teach in the jail; jail assignments should be voluntary. Offer professional development and a means by which to address issues. Consider offering mileage and stipends to cover additional travel expenses and time required of faculty teaching inside the jail.



Adapt to the Jail Environment

- **Prepare for technology-free enrollment processes and classrooms:** Jails lack accessible internet, which requires enrollment to be completed by hand, taken back to campus, and entered manually. This process can be burdensome, but colleges have worked to bring Admissions and Records staff into the jail to facilitate assessment and enrollment processes. Check with

the jail to determine what technology the classroom provides ahead of the semester and communicate these restrictions to faculty so they are prepared.

- **Allot time for jail orientation and security clearance:** Faculty and staff must gain security clearance prior to entering the jail. This process can take several weeks, so work with the Sheriff's Department to determine how far in advance faculty and staff need to apply for security clearance. Additionally, the jail will likely require staff and faculty to attend a jail orientation that covers jail protocols and procedures. Allocate time for these jail processes, and, if required by your union agreement, compensate faculty for their time to attend orientation.
- **Gain approval for teaching materials:** The Sheriff's Department will need to approve all books and course materials that your faculty plans to use in the jail. Work with the Sheriff's Department to determine what materials need to be cleared and what the approval processes are.



Work Closely with Relevant College Colleagues

- **Flag the amount of staff time and expertise required for enrollment:** As explained above, the Admissions and Records Department will have to enter all handwritten student enrollment information manually. Be candid about the unique admissions and records needs your incarcerated students will have.
- **Use the new Excused Withdrawal (EW) when necessary:** When students are released or transferred mid-semester, they risk receiving a Withdrawal (W) on their transcripts. The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office approved the use of a new Excused Withdrawal (EW) for incarcerated students who cannot complete a course due to early release or involuntary transfer. The EW ensures the student avoids the adverse consequences attached to a W. Read more about the [revision to Title 5 here](#).⁹

- **Waive fees for incarcerated students:** Incarcerated students cannot access many campus services, like healthcare and gym facilities, that trigger additional fees for students. The California College Promise Grant doesn't cover these fees, and they can pose an unreasonable burden on incarcerated students and their families. Waive student fees, through the Board of Trustee if necessary, for students who cannot access campus services associated with those fees. View an [example resolution here](#).¹⁰



Be Thoughtful in Program Design

- **Do an assessment to determine the program model:** Colleges teaching in jails use a variety of models. Some colleges work with cohorts, leveraging peer relationships as a way to increase engagement and retention. Others use the Inside-Out model, bringing on-campus students into the jail as way to combat the negative stigma of incarceration and build goodwill between community members. Others blend the college offering with high school diploma pathways. Work with the jail to determine the model that best suites both partners.
- **Consider job placement opportunities when offering CTE programs:** CTE certificates can be a great way to introduce new students to college coursework while simultaneously developing workforce skills. Besides local labor market needs, consider the length of a certificate program and whether the program is in a field that individuals with criminal records can obtain. In a high tourism county, for example, a college might offer courses leading to a Hospitality Industry certificate.

For Sheriff's Departments



Identify Eligible Students

- **Establish participation requirements:** Many Sheriff's Departments base enrollment decisions on length of stay and include a mix of sentenced and pre-sentenced and low- and medium-level security incarcerated students in the classes.
- **Consider release dates in the enrollment process:** Doing so will ensure that no student is enrolled in a course s/he/they cannot complete. Colleges offer varying semester lengths, but it's best to avoid enrolling a student who will be released mid-semester. If an enrolled student is released early, communicate the early release plan to the college so the student has the opportunity to complete the course on the outside or to receive an Excused Withdrawal.



Prepare for Change

- **Consider the burden placed on staff:** Bringing a college into the jail places additional responsibilities on the jail staff. Staff will need to move students, identify who is eligible for enrollment, and track release dates to assist in discharge planning. Build in staff time to handle these additional responsibilities.
- **Anticipate a shift in culture:** College programs can be transformative for students and correctional facilities alike. When an enrolled student takes on the "college student" identity, confidence is bolstered and the time spent incarcerated takes on new meaning. This is a positive outcome, but can shift the usual dynamics between correctional staff and those who are incarcerated. Anticipate potential staff resistance, especially to the fact that incarcerated students are receiving a college education while incarcerated. Remind staff that jail students are not receiving anything that isn't also available to students on campus, and make space for staff to air their concerns or disagreements.



Allocate Time, Space, and Resources

- **Devote adequate staff time to this partnership:** An education coordinator or programs/rehabilitation director will need to allocate staff time to implementing and running this new program. This partnership requires time dedicated to identifying students, scheduling courses, attending provider meetings, and completing administrative paperwork tracking students and release dates.
- **Allocate funding to the program:** Across the state, Sheriff's Departments are funding a portion of these programs in a variety of ways. Some use the Inmate Welfare Fund to cover the costs of textbooks, computers, and supplies. Others who are running CTE programs inside their jail are tapping into Adult Education Block Grant (AEBG) and Realignment funding.



Incentivize Participation

- **Encourage enrollment:** Consider asking the college to host an information session for interested students. While many incarcerated Californians are eager to start college, others are swayed after learning about the many benefits a college education can provide. An information session can help students gain confidence and comfort in the process by meeting faces from the college and having an opportunity to get questions answered.
- **Reward participation with milestone credits:** In the spirit of the incentives created by Proposition 57 that apply to state prisoners, consider offering local milestone credits for jail students who complete college courses. Incentivizing course completion can increase enrollment and provide motivation to continue taking college courses after release, increasing the likelihood that the person will not return to jail.

▶ Innovators in the Field

Imperial Valley College and the Imperial County Sheriff's Office

- **Inside-Out model:** Community colleges need a minimum number of enrolled students for a for-credit class to be financially viable. The Inside-Out model allows the class to proceed with half jail students and half campus students, lessening the burden on the jail if there are low numbers of eligible students in custody. To learn more about the additional benefits of the Inside-Out model, check out [the program's website](#).¹¹
- **Hybrid CTE program in the jail and on campus:** The college offers a six semester CTE certificate in Air Conditioning and Refrigeration. This program targets incarcerated students serving longer sentences by offering education and job training for an employable trade in the region. Students attend lectures inside the jail and take labs once a week on campus. The program is structured so that students can complete the required courses on campus if they are released from jail prior to certificate completion.

Santa Rosa Junior College, Sonoma County Sheriff's Office, and the Sonoma County Probation Department

- **Non-credit courses as an on-ramp for getting students enrolled:** Non-credit courses enable the college to enroll students they would otherwise not reach. In doing so, the college is expanding its reach and putting more students on the pathway to their on-campus experience. Additionally, non-credit courses do not have the same minimum student requirements as for-credit courses.
- **Dedicated staff:** Santa Rosa Junior College and the Santa Rosa Sheriff's Office each pay 50% of an Outreach Specialist's salary. This person works both in the jail and on the college campus, and provides a single point of contact for students transitioning from incarceration

to reentry. The Outreach Specialist is knowledgeable about both institutions and can assist an incarcerated or campus student through college processes.

- **Warm hand-off from jail to campus:** When an incarcerated student is nearing release, the jail communicates the timeline to the Outreach Specialist. The Outreach Specialist then prepares extensive discharge planning for the student and arranges for a campus tour with enrollment assistance if desired.

Santa Barbara City College and the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office

- **Transitions summer bridge program for formerly incarcerated students:** This six-week program gives formerly incarcerated students a solid foundation on community college academics and activities. The program runs once a year and the EOPS office works to enroll students who completed programming in the county jail while they were incarcerated. To learn more about the program, check out [the website](#).¹²
- **One-unit Orientation to College class for jail students:** The college offers a six-week, one-unit class to introduce students to the college shortly before they are being released. The course serves as an onramp for students looking to continue their education post-release.

Southwestern College and the San Diego County Sheriff's Department

- **Regional collaboration:** Southwestern College participates in the San Diego Imperial County Community Colleges Association (SDICCA) Restorative Justice Task Force, which is a two-county organization working collaboratively to better serve their community college students. The group unanimously passed a resolution supporting a regional transitional

services program for formerly incarcerated students, which creates effective on-ramps to assist formerly incarcerated students in obtaining the resources and support services needed to achieve academic and career goals. Read [the resolution here](#).¹³

- **Fast-track for-credit courses:** Where possible, the college runs eight week semesters offering for-credit courses in subjects such as personal development, communications, computer literacy, personal finance and money management. These courses have no prerequisite requirements, are the appropriate length for their student population, and address the kinds of learning opportunities requested by their incarcerated students. For these reasons, the fast-track courses see high rates of student success and course completion.

Notes

1. BSCC California, "Jail Population Trends," October 2017, <https://public.tableau.com/profile/kstevens#!/vizhome/ACJROctober2013/ADPRatedCapacity>
2. Mukamal, D., Silbert, R., and Taylor, R.M. (2015). *Degrees of freedom: Expanding college opportunities for currently and formerly incarcerated Californians*. Stanford Criminal Justice Center, Stanford University, and the Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy, the University of California, Berkeley.
3. Lofstrom, M., Bird, M., and Martin, B. Public Policy Institute of California, "California's Historic Corrections Reforms," September 2016, http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_916MLR.pdf
4. Id
5. Id
6. Connecting with Your Local Community College: California Chancellor's Office Prospective Student Mailer
7. Link to district boundary map: <http://www.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=1deb7bf9af214277ae4ed-29a6af5e09b&extent=-124.868,32.9558,-108.6412,42.0352>
8. Link to directory: <http://correctionstocollegeca.org/program-directory>
9. Link to Title 5 revision: <http://correctionstocollegeca.org/resources/new-excused-withdrawal-for-incarcerated-students-revision-to-title-5>
10. Link to resolution: <http://correctionstocollegeca.org/resources/resolution-to-waive-student-health-fee-for-incarcerated-students>
11. Link to Imperial Valley College program: <https://www.imperial.edu/courses-and-programs/inside-out/>
12. Link to Santa Barbara City College program: <http://www.sbccc.edu/eopscare/Transitions.php>
13. Link to resolution: <http://correctionstocollegeca.org/resources/sdiccca-ceo-resolution-passed-unanimously>