

MONTANA

OFFICE OF REENTRY REPORT

June 2026



Montana Department of
LABOR & INDUSTRY





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State of Montana

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In 2025, the Montana Legislature enacted House Bill 718, establishing the Office of Reentry within the Department of Labor and Industry to coordinate services and programs for individuals exiting or preparing to exit incarceration and reenter communities. The law directs a coordinated approach that connects programs and services across agencies and engages stakeholders in the development of services.

The creation of the office reflects an important reality: reentry is closely tied to both public safety and labor force participation. Employment and skill development can support successful reintegration and reduce recidivism, while Montana's low unemployment rate and ongoing labor shortages increase the importance of connecting more people to work for sustained economic growth. Increasing hiring of former offenders and targeting programs to remove barriers is a priority initiative in the 406 JOBS Year One Work Plan, and the efforts of the Office of Reentry reflect the accomplishment of key year one tasks to implement HB 718, develop a coordination strategy for reentry services, and improve referrals across agencies for more seamless transitions.

This report provides context for that work by describing Montana's reentry labor market, the barriers faced by individuals returning from incarceration, and the early activities of the Office of Reentry. The report highlights key areas of reentry services requiring attention, details the milestones reached during the first year, and shares valuable insights on barriers and challenges to help guide future policy and program development. Key details in this report include:

- In the first year after incarceration, reintegration rates are nearly 90%. However, over the next five years, reintegration rates fall to under 60%, reflecting challenges that persist beyond the first year of release.
- While research shows that employment is one of the strongest drivers of successful reintegration, just over 50% of individuals released from Montana corrections facilities found UI-covered employment in Montana their first year after release.
- Individuals returning from incarceration face barriers that go beyond job readiness. WIOA program data reveal that former offenders report employment barriers at nearly twice the rate of other program participants.
- In its first year, the Office of Reentry established partnerships and processes needed to build a coordinated statewide reentry system while engaging with stakeholders to understand the needs in reentry services.

This report is organized into two sections. The first examines Montana's reentry labor market characteristics such as the size of the reentry population, employment and wage outcomes following release, and the industry sectors where former offenders most commonly find work. It also dives into the barriers individuals face during reentry, drawing on stakeholder engagement, WIOA program data, and community input gathered through the Office of Reentry's first year of operation. The second section documents the year one activities of the Office of Reentry, the partnerships formed, processes established, and investments made during year one and concludes with the office's priorities looking ahead.

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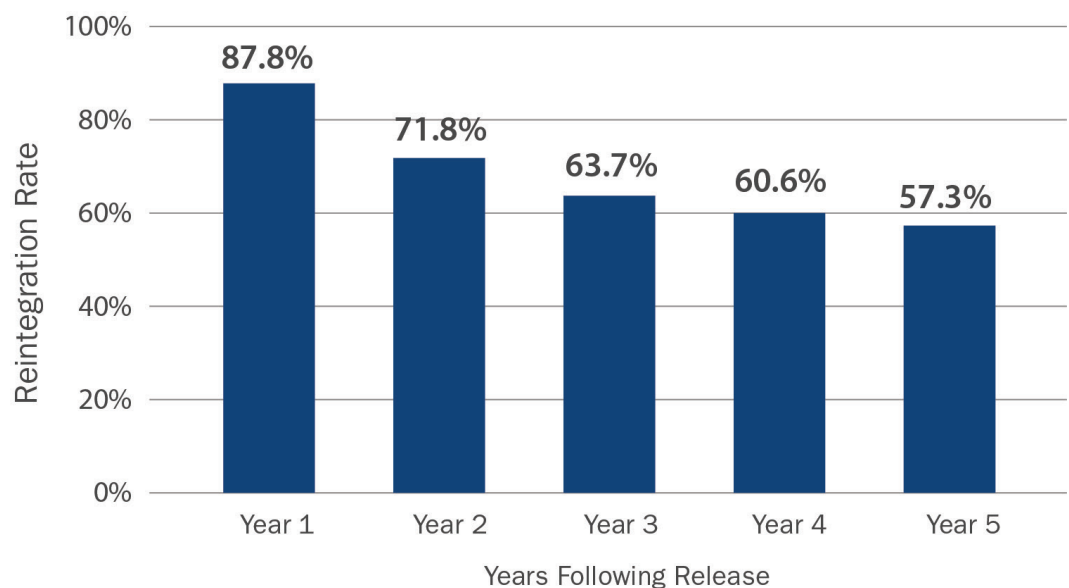
Montana's Reentry Labor Market

Montana's Reentry Population and Reintegration Rates

Montana's six secure detention facilities, nine treatment centers, and eight prerelease centers average a population of approximately 4,500 people¹ at any given time, with over 800 individuals released each year going through reentry into their communities². Beyond those releases, over 10,000 individuals remain under probation and parole across the state³. A successful reintegration into communities and the workforce is important, and the Office of Reentry aims to promote successful reintegration by improving labor market and job success and addressing challenges around reintegration.

The Montana Department of Corrections measures reintegration as the successful accomplishing of three criteria following release from prison; no new convictions, no new incarceration, and no new revocation of supervision. The reintegration rate is measured as the percent of individuals released from prison that successfully accomplish these three criteria. Montana's year one reintegration rate for individuals released from prison in 2024 was 89.4%. As seen in Figure 1, the rate of successful reintegration declines over time. For individuals released in 2019 and 2020 the five-year reintegration rate was 57.3%. Reentry programs that support high quality wage and employment outcomes are a potential opportunity to improve reintegration outcomes over the long-term.

FIGURE 1: Reintegration Rates in Montana for Individuals Released from State Corrections Facilities



Source: Montana Department of Corrections Interactive Dashboards, Combined 2019-2020 Rate

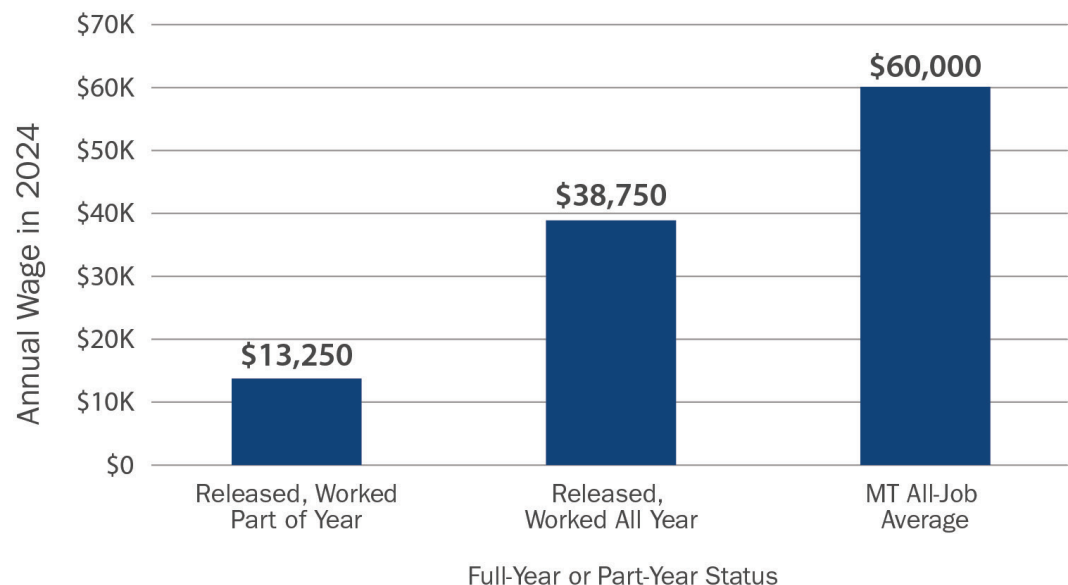
- 1 DOC Six Month Population Summary Dashboard accessed 5/6/2026
- 2 DOC Reintegration Dashboard accessed 5/6/2026
- 3 DOC Six Month Population Summary Dashboard accessed 5/6/2026

The Importance of Employment Following Reentry

Research consistently identifies employment as one of the strongest predictors of whether an individual remains successfully reintegrated in the years following release. In Montana, there is a significant opportunity to improve employment outcomes for the reentry population, and doing so could meaningfully move the needle on reintegration rates in the state. The following section examines what employment looks like for individuals leaving Montana's correctional facilities and why improving employment rates matters.

An analysis of individuals released from state corrections facilities found that just over half found any employment during the first year following release and only a third worked year-round. For those that did find employment for a full year, the average wage observed was about \$40,000, less than two-thirds of the statewide average wage. For those individuals unable to secure full-year work, the average wage was only \$13,250 in that first year.

FIGURE 2: Average Wages in the Year Following Incarceration, by Work Duration, 2024



Source: MT DLI Wage Match Analysis for 2023Q4 MT Dept. of Corrections Releases

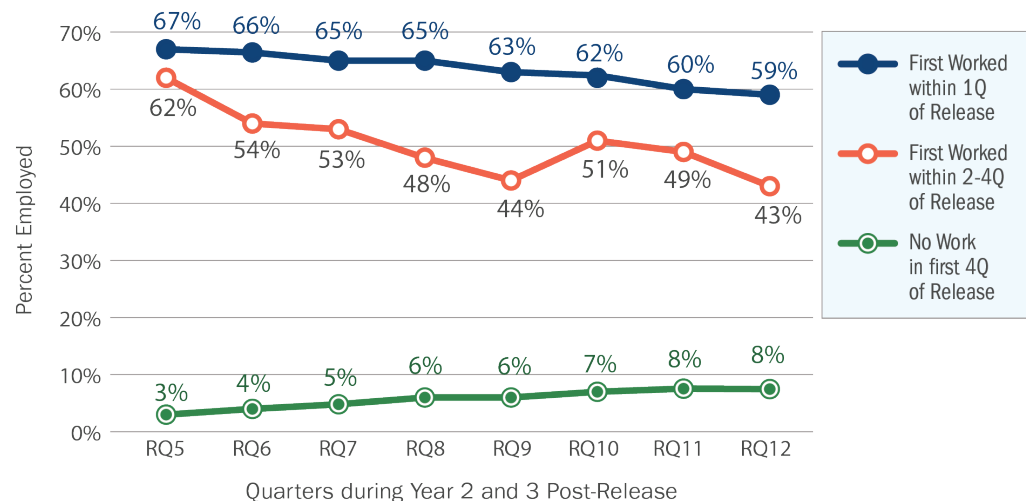
Successful reentry differs across the nature of offense or sentencing and factors such as time spent incarcerated. An analysis of the placement at final release for reentry individuals shows significantly different employment outcomes. Individuals exiting from secure confinement, or parole, found work in all four quarters following release at a rate of only 15%, half that of the 30% exiting from probation.

According to national data on individuals released from federal corrections, formerly incarcerated individuals who maintain employment for one-year post-release experience a recidivism rate of just 16% over the first three years of reentry,

compared to 52% for those unable to maintain employment that first year — a 36-percentage-point difference⁴. Other research reinforces this finding, as well as the importance of obtaining employment shortly after release. One study showed that individuals who obtained employment within the first two months following release were significantly more likely to avoid recidivism over the next eight to twelve months⁵.

Similarly, finding a job in the first year is strongly associated with maintaining employment itself in the years beyond. Figure 3 shows the employment rate in years two and three after release (the fifth through twelfth quarters after release). For the portion of the release cohort that doesn't find work in the first year, at no point were more than 10% of them employed in years two and three. While employment rates fell over time for those that did find employment, those that were able to find work immediately maintained higher employment rates and saw a much less significant decline over time. For those that found employment immediately, employment rates fell eight percentage points over the two years observed, compared to a 19 percentage point drop for those that found work two to four quarters after release.

FIGURE 3: Employment Rates After Release, by Time of First Job



Source: DLI Wage Match Analysis of 2022 MT Dept. of Corrections Releases

In Montana, the most common industry for employment immediately following release is accommodations and food service, providing the first job following release for one in four people. The next most common industries are retail trade, and construction, both worked at elevated rates among the released workforce compared to the overall workforce. Figure 4 shows the distribution of employment in the first year after release by industry, and compared to the statewide average (QCEW, 2024). In contrast, individuals reentering the workforce are much less likely to find employment in healthcare, education, government, and financial activities.

⁴ www.uschamber.com/workforce/data-deep-dive-the-workforce-impact-of-second-chance-hiring-3

⁵ www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/32106/411778-Employment-after-Prison-A-Longitudinal-Study-of-Releasees-in-Three-States.PDF

FIGURE 4: Industry Distribution of First Jobs in Reentry, Compared to Statewide Employment

Industry Group*	% of Reentry Employment	% Statewide Employment	Avg Wages First year of Reentry
Food & Accommodations	26%	12%	\$ 18,734
Retail Trade	17%	12%	\$ 28,042
Construction	14%	8%	\$ 38,032
Business Activities (including temp work)	11%	10%	\$ 26,880
Health and Education	9%	23%	\$ 30,157
Manufacturing	8%	4%	\$ 39,639
Wholesale Trade, Transportation	5%	7%	\$ 43,114
Other	5%	5%	\$ 26,097
Natural Resources	3%	3%	\$ 42,741
Government	2%	8%	\$ 26,775
Recreation	2%	3%	\$ 18,204

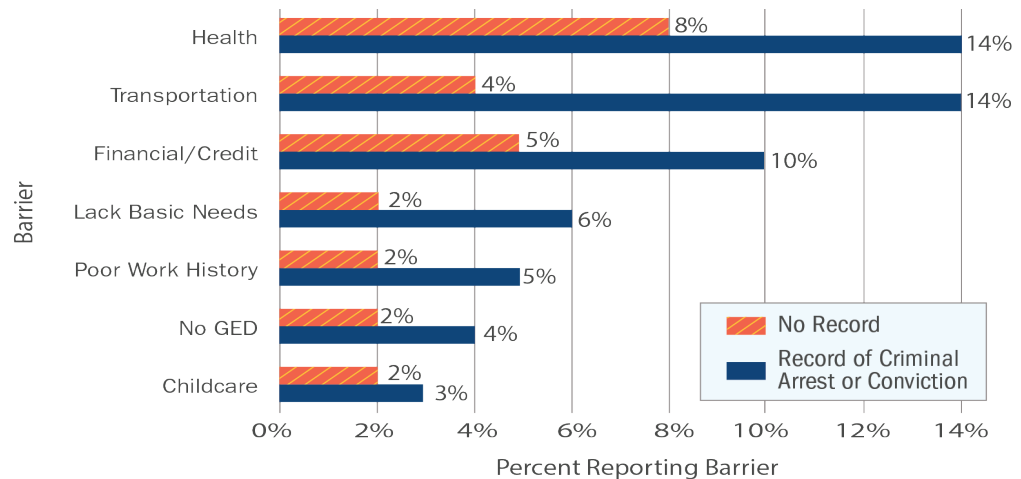
Source: DLI Wage Match Analysis of 2023 MT Dept. of Corrections Releases. *Industry is defined as the first job worked after release, though some workers will earn wages from jobs in multiple industries

The industries that reentry individuals tend to work in explain part of the observed low wages of the reentry population, but not all. For example, average annual wages for reentry workers in food & accommodations are under \$19,000 per year, and make up a large portion of reentry jobs. However, even those who find work in above average wage industries, such as construction, tend to earn less than the statewide industry average for the sector.

Employment Barriers During Reentry

The barriers facing individuals returning from incarceration are wide-ranging and often compounding. Data from Montana's WIOA workforce programs offer a useful starting point for understanding their scale: program participants who report a record of criminal arrest or conviction identify an employment barrier at nearly twice the rate of those without (50% compared to 20%). As shown in Figure 5, the most reported barriers among this population relate to health, transportation, and finances.

FIGURE 5: Percent of WIOA Participants Reporting Barriers, by Barrier Type



Source: EmployMT

During its first year of operation, the Office of Reentry worked directly with stakeholders, including corrections staff, prerelease center directors, workforce consultants, education and training providers, and community support partners. These efforts helped develop a more comprehensive understanding of the specific barriers that hinder successful employment after release. The following subsections describe what that engagement has surfaced.

Identification Documents

Obtaining valid identification can be a significant barrier to employment for those released from incarceration. Securing work authorization requires multiple documents, including proof of identity, proof of residency, a Social Security card, and a certified birth certificate. These documents can be difficult to obtain upon release. While Montana Department of Corrections policy (MSP 3.1.101) outlines procedures for providing state-incarcerated individuals with photo ID, replacement Social Security cards, and birth certificates prior to release, no statutory requirement mandates this, and the process is not consistently available for federally detained individuals. Without valid identification, formerly incarcerated individuals cannot complete Form I-9 employment eligibility verification on day one following release.

Housing

Securing housing is a critical first step to successful reintegration and reemployment as well. A stable address can be required for obtaining identification as well as for employer contact. However, a criminal record often results in automatic disqualification from private landlords and can lead to denial of federally subsidized housing. While organizations like Montana Re-Entry in Laurel and the Montana Community Reentry Coalition in Missoula exist to aid former offenders in securing housing, individuals still often face challenges that can have negative impacts on the ability to quickly secure employment following release.

Transportation

Upon release from incarceration, one of the most consistent barriers faced by individuals is access to consistent transportation. Montana is a rural state, and access to public transportation that would otherwise provide reliable means of commuting can be a limitation, particularly for individuals working non-traditional hours (2nd or 3rd shift). These transportation barriers can be compounded by the need to attend group sessions and other check-ins held by probation and parole during weekday working hours. Employers may be disincentivized to hire reentry workers, due to the need to flexibly schedule around these meetings.

Montana Department of Transportation's Section 5311 program supports rural transit, but services are primarily designed for daytime, urban commuting. Off-shift and late-night service remain limited, reducing employment access outside standard hours. In southeast Montana, LIFTT's regional transit services cover wide areas across 18 counties, but findings from local focus groups highlight significant gaps, especially for off-peak travel essential for shift workers.

Digital Literacy and Access to Technology

Depending on the length of sentencing or conditions of release, digital literacy and access to technology can create a barrier. Access to and literacy in modern technologies for conducting job searches or locating services can be a challenge. In addition, not having internet access or an email address, which is often a requirement for completing job or housing applications, can have a significant negative impact on successful reentry.

Education and Training

Access to education and training remain challenging. While incarcerated, many individuals take advantage of pre-apprenticeships or other training available through Montana Correctional Enterprises for on-the-job training and work experience in industry, vocational, and agricultural programs. However, dates and conditions of release can fluctuate, making it difficult to continue training or secure employment. Additionally, some Montana education providers have limitations against allowing former offenders on campus and a lengthy application process that can be a barrier to education.

Access to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Counseling

Individuals returning from incarceration face behavioral health challenges at a scale far exceeding that of the general population. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) estimates that approximately 44% of people in jail and 37% in prison have a mental illness, compared to 18% of the general population. Substance use disorders are even more prevalent, with an estimated 63% of people in jail and 58% in prison meeting criteria for a substance use disorder, compared to roughly 6–11% of the general population.⁶

Access to these services in Montana can be challenging due to the rural nature of the state and recent trends in access to behavioral health services. Over the last several years, Montana has seen providers close or consolidate operations, limiting access in affected areas. After leaving incarceration, individuals requiring these services may be limited in where they can seek employment geographically, or face challenges retaining their employment due to the limited access to care.

Access to Peer Support

When exiting incarceration, access to a “Peer Navigator/Mentor with lived reentry experience has been shown to ease the transition for individuals and improve reintegration⁷. Training opportunities to become a Behavioral Health Peer Support Specialist are available in Montana, but individuals with reentry backgrounds have reported that licensing requirements can create barriers. Previously, ARM 24.219.301 stated that applicants had to demonstrate two years of recovery that did not include any period of incarceration, hospitalization, or inpatient admission related to a behavioral health disorder lasting more than 72 hours. Under that earlier interpretation, time spent in one of Montana’s eight pre release centers—classified as incarceration—could extend the required recovery period and delay eligibility for licensure. However, at the time of publication, rulemaking is in progress to amend ARM 24.219.301 and clarify that time in a prerelease program is not defined as incarceration for the purposes of this rule. This rule change reduces the time barrier for individuals who have recently exited incarceration and wish to become Licensed Peer Support Specialists, which may help support licensing of more Peer Support Specialists to satisfy the high demand for access to these services.

Tribal Considerations

While Native American’s make up about 7% of Montana’s population, they comprise over 20% of incarcerated individuals in Montana⁷. Montana enacted reforms in 2017 to limit incarceration for technical probation and parole violations, yet these changes have not addressed the underlying reasons for these disparities. Supervision requirements can be challenging to meet for those residing in reservation areas due to the lack of basic services on or near reservations, and long travel distances to

⁶ <https://www.samhsa.gov/communities/criminal-juvenile-justice/about>

⁷ Cor.mt.gov; State Comparison Report - Incarceration Rates and Prison Populations in MT, ND, SD, and WY, 2025

check-ins or classes. With individuals expected to cover the costs of treatment, travel, drug testing, and other requirements, at times while experiencing homelessness or caretaking responsibilities, many find themselves reincarcerated for circumstances beyond their control.

Evidence-based Reentry Practices

The barriers described in the preceding section — housing instability, lack of identification, transportation gaps, limited behavioral health access — are precisely the conditions that research shows will derail employment even when job placement succeeds. Evidence-based reentry programs focused on employment must be designed with this complexity in mind. A 2019 U.S. Department of Labor and Mathematica synthesis of reentry employment research⁸ finds that the most successful programs are those designed to tackle employment, behavioral health, and basic stability needs together.

In this summary of research, it is noted that transitional, subsidized employment produces strongest short-term gains in employment and earnings and can reduce reoffending. However, if subsidized work ends without a transition to quality employment and ongoing support, outcomes deteriorate. Transitional jobs work in the short term but must be paired with longer-term planning and services to hold their impact. Over the longer term, vocational and occupational training that lead to real, marketable credentials offers the most durable pathway to employment and reduced recidivism.

However, the research importantly notes that employment alone is not enough. Job quality matters as much as job placement. Research consistently finds that the wage level and stability of post-release employment is what drives recidivism reduction. A sector-based job training randomized controlled trial (RCT) found that participants with prior criminal records who completed training were only two-fifths as likely to be arrested as those in a control group. The crime-reduction effect was driven primarily by higher earnings rather than employment status alone⁹. Targeting by offense type can also make a difference. A RCT evaluating intensive job placement assistance found it reduced rearrests among nonviolent ex-offenders by 19 percentage points, while producing no meaningful effect for those with violent offense histories¹⁰. These findings reflect the need to have flexible programs to serve a variety of participants.

The overlapping barriers faced during reentry can derail employment even when job placement succeeds. Effective programs treat these as core components. The evidence also makes a strong case for integrating cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) into employment services. One randomized control trial study found that CBT delivered within a juvenile detention center reduced readmission by 21%¹¹. Programs

8 <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/publications/ETAOP2019-11%20REO%20Supporting%20Reentry%20Employment%20RB090319.pdf>

9 <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED672015.pdf>

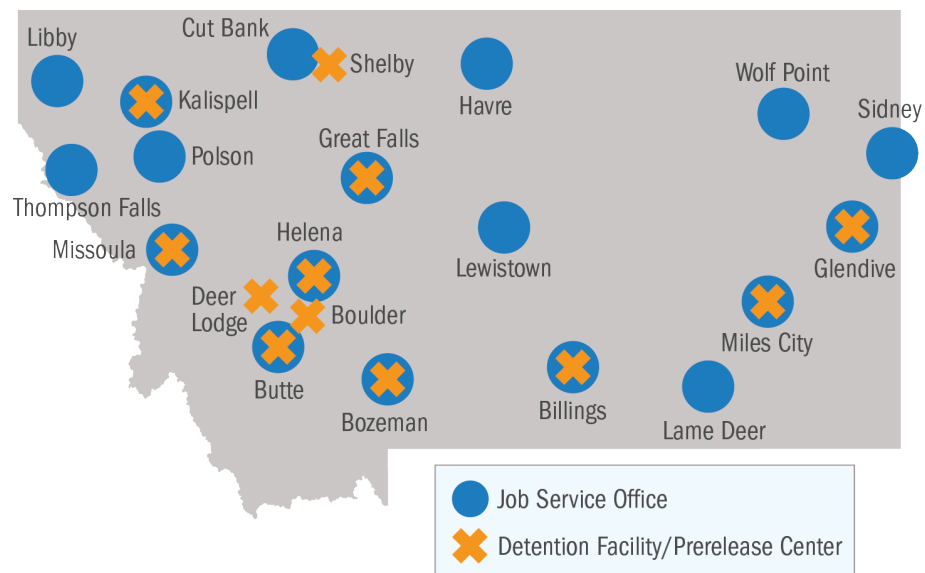
10 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/ecin.12984>

11 <https://academic.oup.com/qje/article-abstract/132/1/1/2724542?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

that combine CBT and employment services consistently outperform those that focus on job readiness in isolation. Peer mentorship from individuals with lived reentry experience also shows measurable impact. A randomized control trial found that pairing standard reentry services with peer mentorship led to significantly lower recidivism than standard services alone, with the quality of the mentor relationship identified as a key driver of outcomes¹².

Opportunity for Coordinated Reentry Activities

Montana has individuals reentering the labor market from state prisons, detention centers, and prerelease programs across the state. As these individuals reenter society, access to employment services at the 18 Job Service Montana offices across the state can provide valuable support in the process. The map below highlights the overlapping site locations of release centers and Job Service, highlighting the potential for coordinated and streamlined reentry services. Few prisons, detention facilities, and prerelease centers lack access to a nearby Job Service for connecting to reemployment services.



¹² <https://www.continuumct.org/files/news/Sells%20et%20al%202020%20Mentors%20Reduce%20Recidivism%20SCPS%20pg%205.pdf>

Reentry Services in Practice

Examples of Reentry Services Making an Impact

After a 2023 felony conviction, one Kalispell resident found himself stuck, unhappy with work in restaurants and unable to secure a new job. Despite genuine skills and a strong work ethic, his record narrowed his options he grew frustrated at the over 150 unsuccessful job applications he had submitted.

When he connected with Kalispell Job Service in September 2025, workforce consultants took a different approach. They worked with him to address the underlying challenges affecting his interviews, including substance use and anger management, and used career assessments to help him identify what he wanted to do. His résumé was rebuilt from the ground up to reflect the full range of his abilities, not just his most recent work history.

The results came quickly and with coaching on how to present himself effectively he was well-prepared when direct employer outreach led to an interview and a job offer. By November 2025 he had started his new role and within weeks his employer was already asking him to work overtime.

His experience reflects what coordinated reentry employment services can accomplish when they meet individuals where they are, address barriers directly, and connect people to work that fits.

When a Sidney resident returned home after incarceration, he came back with a goal of stable employment and a path forward. Working closely with his parole officer, he took the initiative to connect with Job Service Sidney, where a Workforce Consultant assessed his situation and put in motion job readiness activities such as résumé development, interview preparation tailored to disclosing his felony background, and enrollment in the Adult WIOA program.

What set his reentry apart was the depth of coordination behind it. Job Service connected him to LIFTT — Living Independently For Today and Tomorrow — which helped him access SNAP, Medicaid, and Vocational Rehabilitation services, ensuring his basic stability while he worked toward employment. When he expressed a strong interest in earning a Commercial Driver's License, his workforce consultant helped him find a local business willing to support that training once he had completed the necessary steps.

As he prepared to start a new job, he received assistance obtaining the basic tools and work clothing he needed to show up ready on day one. He began his new role with both immediate stability and a clear next step, CDL training, already in motion.

His story illustrates how reentry employment services work best when they extend beyond job placement, connecting individuals supports that make employment not just possible, but sustainable.

Montana Office of Reentry: Year One

The Office of Reentry has embraced the role of convener, bringing together stakeholders across the reentry landscape to foster collaboration and align services with Montana's broader workforce system. By empowering existing partners, the OOR has supported them in refining and expanding their collaborative efforts. The office has actively sought out pockets of successful programming, working to find those that already exist, along with piloting new approaches for future scaling. Additionally, OOR has focused on identifying gaps within the system that contribute to persistent barriers, ensuring that solutions are informed by both proven practices and a clear understanding of unmet needs. In its first year, OOR's strategic approach has centered on strengthening partnerships, understanding local successes and piloting new approaches for future scalability, and documenting and addressing areas where services fall short.

Identification of Key Stakeholders

In its first year, the OOR began working with key stakeholders already engaged across the system while also identifying other partners for service and program coordination. Found in the table that follows this section, these stakeholders range from primary agency partners such as the Department of Corrections and DLI's Job Service Montana involved in direct service provision and referral processes, as well as partners engaged to raise awareness and participation in new reentry activities. Through these partners, the OOR gathered barrier information, identified successful service delivery models, and deployed pilot projects for new forms of service delivery. In addition to regular engagement and coordination with the key stakeholders identified, the OOR conducted engagement and outreach with 11 other organizations, community partners, and agencies that play a role in the reentry process.

Through the process of early engagement with key stakeholders, the following system gaps were identified, these gaps informed actions taken towards a more unified landscape of reentry services.

- Inconsistent communication between reentry partners and lack of systematic data sharing to support coordinated service delivery.
- Significant regional discrepancies in service delivery across the state, resulting in uneven access to essential services across Montana.
- Need for reentry-specific training for workforce development professionals that serve the reentry population.
- Limited data collection and evaluation regarding transitional reentry activities, data systems with limited interoperability, no systematic data sharing across agencies to support coordinated service delivery.

Partner/ Stakeholder	Description	Type of Engagement/Collaborative Effort
State Agencies		
Department of Corrections (DOC) - Montana State Prison - Montana Women's Prison - Pine Hills Facility for Youth - Crossroads Correctional Facility	DOC operates Montana's corrections system, with the mission to create a safer Montana through accountability, rehabilitation, and empowerment, with the vision to promote and contribute to the success of individuals engaged within the criminal justice system.	- DOC-DLI Direct Referral Process: - Collaboration between OOR, DOC Case Managers, and Job Service Workforce Consultants to introduce individuals leaving incarceration to WIOA services available after release - Implemented at the Montana State Prison, the Montana Women's Prison, and Pine Hills Facility for Youth. Planned expansion to Crossroads Correctional Facility. - Engagement with Montana Correctional Enterprises Training program and to Montana Registered Apprenticeship on pre-apprenticeships program enhancements. - Collaborative development of essential skills and job search strategies training for current inmates with the Rehabilitation and Programs Division. - Montana Opioid Abatement Trust Grant (MOAT): Cross-agency grant submission
Prerelease centers (PRCs) - Great Falls - Kalispell - Bozeman	Montana's prerelease centers are designed to assist offenders with their transition from a secure facility back into the community.	- Flathead Valley PRC – First of its kind partnership to embed Job Service Workforce Consultant t PRC to serve resident offenders. - Gallatin County –Exploration of collaborative efforts with local Job Service - Great Falls – Engagement with leadership to understand services, processes. 2026 tours planned with Billings (Alternatives; Passages), Butte PRC, Helena PRC
Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS)	DPHHS provides essential, community-based support for Montanans in their communities to improve health, safety, well-being, and empower independence.	- Partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS) trainer for Motivational Interviewing training at Reentry Reboot meeting. - Collaboration to expand referrals for former offenders on VRBS waitlist into Job Service
Behavioral Health Advisory Council Criminal Justice (BHAC CJ) Subcommittee	The subcommittee is tasked with learning and discussing strengths and weaknesses of mental health care for individuals involved with the justice system; and advocates for evidence-based practices.	OOR Director participates in the subcommittee, provides updates on OOR activities and input on matters presented to the BHAC CJ.

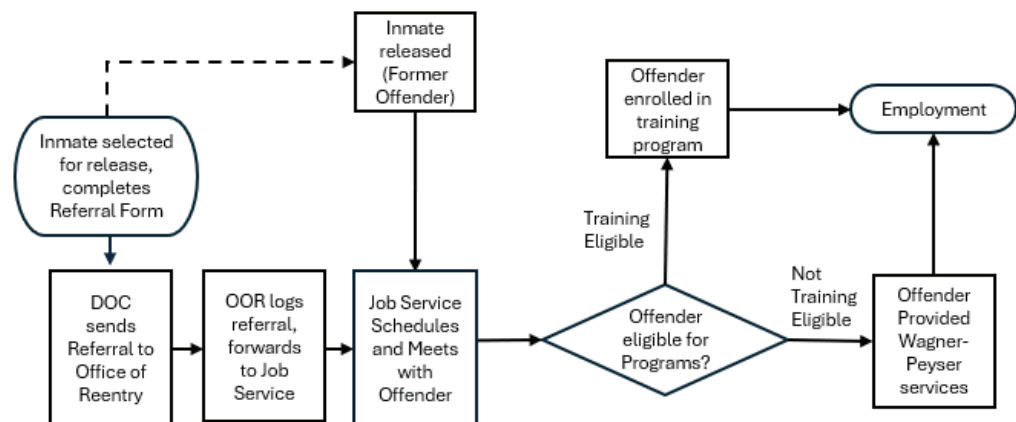
Partner/ Stakeholder	Description	Type of Engagement/Collaborative Effort
Department of Labor and Industry	The Montana Department of Labor & Industry's includes all workforce development and training programs in the Workforce Services Division as well as many other business and labor market regulatory functions.	- Job Service Montana: - Coordinate training and technical assistance related to reentry work for Workforce Consultants across the state. - Updated informational materials for former offenders and established centralized location for resources and communication. - Key role in COR-DLI referral process and planned PRC orientations. - Collaboration with DLI Tribal Liaison on reentry and providing regular OOR updates - Coordination with Business Engagement team to promote Second Chance hiring
Office of Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE)	OCHE serves as the central administrative office for the Montana University System	Coordination and engagement with Director of Transfer and Special Projects/ TRIO Pre-College Programs Director.
Tribal Partners, Community Based Organizations and Local Agencies		
Tribal Employment Rights Office (TERO)	TERO connects Native community members to jobs, training, and apprenticeships tied to projects on or near tribal lands, while enforcing Native hiring preference and helping workers build skills for long-term careers.	- Regular information sharing and updates through at quarterly meetings - Strong coordination with Rocky Boy's TERO office, direct referrals of members who have left incarceration with further connections to local Job Service offices.
MT Community Reentry Coalition (MT CRC)	(MT CRC) is network of community-based coalitions, programs, providers, ministries, and individuals who assist with reintegration in partnership with DOC.	Coordination and updates through monthly meeting attendance and extension of connections with partners and networks.
Native Women's Reentry Collaboration/ Empower 180	Empower 180 is a Montana-based program providing reentry support for Native women transitioning from incarceration.	Coordination and updates through monthly meetings attendance connecting clients to workforce services.
Upskill Flathead	Upskill Flathead is a workforce readiness and digital skills training initiative in Kalispell	Pilot initiative to develop portable one-hour digital literacy training modules with intention to make materials available to prerelease centers statewide.

Actions Taken

One of the first steps taken to address inconsistent service delivery across the state was to strengthen connections between individuals exiting incarceration and workforce and reemployment services. Working together with COR leadership, Case Managers, and Job Service Workforce Consultants, the OOR created and launched a standardized referral process that connects secure detention facilities with workforce services at Job Service Montana for individuals upon their release.

The new direct referral starts with a virtual meeting prior to release, including the incarcerated individual, COR case managers, and Job Service Workforce Consultants. The meeting includes an introduction to employment services and an early connection to a workforce consultant for continued assistance after release. The full referral process can be seen in Figure 6. Currently, this referral system is utilized at the Montana State Prison in Deer Lodge, the Montana Women's Prison in Billings, and Pine Hills Facility for Youth in Miles City with plans to expand to Crossroads Correctional Facility in Shelby. The first direct referral from Pine Hills Correctional Facility to Billings Job Service was facilitated by the OOR and resulted in the young adult seeking employment assistance immediately after leaving incarceration.

FIGURE 6: Standardized COR-Job Service Referral Process



Through engagement with Upskill Flathead, the OOR identified a basic job skills training for digital literacy, foundational office software, internet safety, soft skills for job retention, and device setup designed to be portable to prerelease centers statewide. Shown to be successful in use in the Flathead area, the Upskill Flathead training is being modeled to create a portable training to incorporate into a toolkit that can be deployed at prerelease centers statewide.

Reentry Reboot meetings provided an essential platform for delivering specialized training developed by the OOR. These sessions included Motivational Interviewing and Trauma-Informed Care, equipping service providers with enhanced skills and practical tools to more effectively support individuals transitioning back into their communities.

after incarceration. By focusing on evidence-based approaches, the trainings strengthened the capacity of reentry professionals to address the unique needs of this population and promote successful outcomes.

Continuing Reentry Reboot meetings offer opportunity to disseminate best practices and promote continuous improvement among reentry service delivery. The Office of Reentry has also created a centralized location for digital communication and knowledge sharing between the Office of Reentry and Job Service staff and management, serving as the primary communication channel and resource hub.

The OOR has made a significant investment in developing connections in the reentry space through visits to correctional facilities, Job Service offices, tribal communities, and local partners directly. These activities have served to build relationships, strengthen coordination, and identify barriers that cannot be seen from a distance. In a state where many facilities and reentry service providers operate with limited resources and are often hours apart, face-to-face engagement established trust, increased buy-in, and ensured that processes work not just in policy but in practice. These visits improve referral processes, ensure consistency across facilities, and accelerate employment outcomes—ultimately reducing recidivism and strengthening Montana’s workforce.

Program Investment

Since the launch of the Office of Reentry, Montana’s WIOA Title I and III workforce programs included over 700 participants reporting a record of criminal arrest or conviction. In WIOA title II, Adult Education, about 330 former offender participants were assisted in the year ending June 2026, while in WIOA Title IV, Vocational Rehabilitation, recent reports show over 850 participants in a year. These counts of participants include more than just individuals transitioning from an immediate release, underscoring the substantial population in Montana still facing significant barriers to employment and the opportunity to provide tailored services through existing workforce services infrastructure.

A fragmented data landscape makes counting total program participation and costs challenging, and the OOR has identified this as a key area for future action. In partnership with the other core agencies engaged in reentry services, OOR is working to improve data sharing and program cohesiveness to make this reporting possible.

In March 2026, the OOR onboarded a Reentry Program Support Specialist to strengthen research, training, data systems, and continuous quality improvement (CQI). This added resource adds near on-demand support and technical assistance to Job Service staff providing reentry assistance and has seen increasing requests for assistance in this area. Through this effort, stronger collaboration across field offices is apparent and the OOR can better ensure follow-through on new initiatives like the COR-DLI referral process. The addition of the Reentry Program Support Specialist

also expands OOR’s capacity to analyze emerging data, refine training content and delivery, and lead continuous improvement projects—building toward robust outcome measurement (employment placement, retention, and recidivism).

The Office of Reentry will release a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) in summer 2026, with awards anticipated in early fall, to invest the \$120,000 in job training support authorized by the 2025 Legislature. The RFP will seek qualified training providers to deliver industry-recognized, credential-bearing job training and soft-skills instruction to adults 18 and older within 12 months after release from supervision. Funded projects will be expected to coordinate closely with the OOR and local partners to provide job training, placement support, and wraparound services that improve employment, education, housing stability, transportation access, and behavioral health engagement for people exiting incarceration. The goals of this investment are to increase access to meaningful training while incarcerated and/or upon exit, strengthen connections to quality jobs or Registered Apprenticeship, and reduce recidivism by addressing key barriers to work. Selected providers will be required to submit quarterly reports on participants served, costs per participant, credentials earned, and post-exit placement and retention outcomes. Additional details on program design, budget expectations, scoring, and reporting requirements will be published with the full RFP this summer.

FIGURE 7: Office of Reentry Org Chart



OOR Year Two Activities

In the first year of the OOR, significant effort was made to establish the office’s connections and partner networks, determine the landscape of reentry services, identify gaps in knowledge and service delivery, and develop strategic efforts to move the work of OOR forward. OOR has taken the work of year one and is looking forward to implementing new processes, scaling impactful solutions, and coordinating activities that emphasize statewide access and alignment with measurable outcomes of success that integrate with the core workforce goals of Montana’s 406 JOBS initiative.

Looking ahead, the OOR is committed to pursuing several immediate goals designed to directly address the gaps identified within the reentry services landscape. These objectives aim to strengthen connections, streamline processes, and provide targeted support for individuals transitioning back into the workforce:

- Establish and strengthen referral pipelines from all state prison facilities, by refining and extending the updated DOC-DLI referral process to Crossroads Correctional Center in Shelby and Dawson County Correctional Facility in Glendive and introducing more formal technical solutions to improve communication and case coordination.
- Bring reemployment services directly to individuals reintegrating into the workforce, by ensuring consistent orientations to employment services available through Job Service in all prerelease centers statewide.
- Award funding for reentry-specific job training support, establishing programs designed to specifically support reentry efforts.
- Deepen coordination with Vocational Rehabilitation to streamline access to accommodations, training, and employment supports for individuals with disabilities.
- Scale training on specialized competencies key to serving the reentry population to all Job Service Workforce Consultants (Motivational Interviewing, trauma-informed care, digital literacy coaching, employer engagement).
- Convene a Reentry Roadshow across ten Montana cities and towns with the goal of strengthening local coordination, further surfacing barriers to employment in reentry, and sharing resources across partners.
- Establish metrics and reporting mechanisms that track outcomes from OOR activities and improve the information base for in the areas of:
 - Engagement: Referrals, prerelease contacts, orientation coverage, service uptake.
 - Employment: Placements, retention, wage progression, employer participation in incentive programs.
 - Stability Indicators: Access to IDs, transportation solutions, housing connections, behavioral health engagement, digital skills.
 - Recidivism: Returns to custody and supervision outcomes among participants in reentry programs.

The priorities outlined above stem directly from the findings of this report: Montana's reentry population faces considerable employment challenges and a range of well-documented barriers that, while recognized, demand continued, targeted action. In its inaugural year, the Office of Reentry has not only laid the groundwork for impactful change, but has also demonstrated measurable progress toward closing these gaps.