



Results First

Final Benefit-Cost Analysis Report on Department of Corrections

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Project Background

In 2012, the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) partnered with the Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative to evaluate the return on investment of its adult criminal and juvenile justice programs.

CJC calculated the avoided costs to the criminal justice system due to program effectiveness. In other words, because a criminal justice program was successful at changing the behavior of an offender (and thus reducing recidivism), Oregon's criminal justice system was able to avoid costs related to re-offending. Analysts at CJC calculated that monetary value, which is shown in the table below.

Along with contextual information about the needs of the offender population and each prison institution's capacity for providing programming, this analysis is a valuable tool to aid decision-making.

The benefits to cost ratio estimates the amount of avoided costs for every dollar spent, akin to return on investment. Because each of these programs is appropriate for a slightly different population, making recommendations for expanding or reducing programs is more complicated than simply ranking the programs based on their benefit cost ratio.

Table 1. Benefit-Cost Results for DOC Programs

Program name	Benefits to cost ratio ¹	Oregon Program Expenses	Oregon Costs Avoided	Taxpayer benefits	Odds of positive return on investment
				Non-taxpayer benefits	
Cognitive behavioral therapy (high and moderate risk offenders)	\$7.54	(\$1,707)	\$12,867	\$3,111	100 %
				\$9,756	
Correctional education (basic or post-secondary) in prison	\$11.86	(\$1,778)	\$21,080	\$4,844	100 %
				\$16,236	
Inpatient/intensive outpatient drug treatment (incarceration)	\$4.06	(\$3,873)	\$15,726	\$3,783	100 %
				\$11,943	
Outpatient/non-intensive drug treatment (incarceration)	\$11.64	(\$1,309)	\$15,240	\$3,685	100 %
				\$11,554	
Vocational education in prison	\$12.03	(\$1,661)	\$19,989	\$4,524	100 %
				\$15,465	

Recommendation 1: Additional research to determine Oregon-specific effects and examine fidelity to programming quality.

Each of the programs in Table 1 has been extensively researched in studies that identify how effective the program can be. The measure of program effectiveness can tell us how much any given program can affect Oregon: in reduced recidivism, in improved offender outcomes, in state costs avoided. Additional research, such as doing quasi-experimental analysis, will contribute to our understanding of the impact of these programs on both the population served and the state. This type of analysis can be done on programs currently included in the model, and can also be expanded to programs operating in Oregon that haven't been well-studied.

In-depth program evaluation may also be done to examine whether programs in Oregon are operating according to the guidelines established by successful programs. Program details, like hours of instruction or appropriate participant matching, should meet certain standards in order to get the best results. This is known as operating with fidelity to the program model and is an important component of evidence-based programs.

¹ Dollars returned per \$1 invested in program

Recommendation 2: Examine potential program participants to determine barriers to program engagement and completion.

Additional data provided by DOC indicate that a number of participants do not complete their programs. While research results are calculated for all participants, not just program completers, positive impacts are generally better for completers than participants. Improving program completion should boost overall outcomes. Efforts should be made to identify and address the barriers to treatment completion, beginning with programs with the highest turnover, such as Welding and Building Construction Technology.

Recommendation 3: Increase vocational education program offerings.

Vocational education programs have the highest benefit-cost ratio overall, and likely have positive impacts on participants beyond lowering recidivism rates, such as improving job prospects and increasing personal income. Currently six vocational education programs are offered. DOC should explore both expanding existing programs and adding new vocational areas.

Table 2. Benefit-Cost Results for OCE programs

Oregon Program name	Benefits to cost ratio	Oregon Program Expenses	Total Costs Avoided	Taxpayer benefits	Odds of positive return on investment
				Non-taxpayer benefits	
Oregon Correctional Enterprises (OCE; correctional industries in prison)	\$5.20	(\$4,891)	\$21,350	\$4,898	100%
				\$16,452	

Recommendation 4: Expand Oregon Correctional Enterprises (OCE) programs and provide additional employment programming.

Oregon Correctional Enterprises (OCE) is listed in a separate table for a few reasons. First, it is self-funded rather than state-funded, so the benefit to cost calculation should be interpreted differently. The cost of the program is not funded by taxpayer dollars, yet the program still benefits the state by avoiding criminal justice system costs. Second, the assessment of the program’s effectiveness comes from an Oregon-specific study, as opposed to a generalized national study. OCE is valuable because it reduces recidivism, improves job skills, and provides a productive way to spend time in prison – providing some of the key elements that offenders need to successfully reintegrate into society when their period of incarceration ends. Conversations with representatives from both OCE and DOC indicate that it can be a challenge to find suitable candidates for some of the jobs provided through OCE. DOC should explore programs that provide employment mentors to OCE participants to improve job retention. DOC should also consider an employment readiness program to increase the numbers of participants who are prepared to successfully work at OCE.