

## **Fair Chances to Opportunity (FCO) Request for Proposals**

The Vera Institute of Justice's Unlocking Potential Initiative is requesting proposals for the Fair Chances to Opportunity (FCO) program. The goal of this hybrid (virtual and in-person) program is to increase access to in-demand jobs and meaningful careers for justice-impacted people post-release, which will be achieved by working with corrections and community stakeholders to:

- Assess the local and statewide landscape of reentry education and employment support from the point of postsecondary education in prisons through high-quality employment obtainment post-release.
- Bridge the connection and facilitate a working relationship between stakeholders.
- Establish collaborative solutions that result in stronger connections between employers and job training and education programs so more people are being hired into meaningful jobs post-release, and so employers have connections to more talent.

Vera seeks to support sites along the reentry education and employment continuum and will:

- Engage state corrections and postsecondary education providers in the state prisons, reentry service providers, and employers at the local level.
- Provide an analysis of local in-demand careers where there are fewer barriers for people with felonies and the relevant training/education required to prepare people for those jobs.
- Work with partners in key regions of states (county/ies or municipality) where approximately 50 percent or more of people are returning from prison.
- Engage formerly-incarcerated experts throughout the project.

Three sites comprising a diverse participant workgroup of key reentry stakeholders will be selected. Below you will find a target timeline and brief overview of FCO:

- **Summit** (Virtual: Thursday, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 12-4 PM ET)
  - This virtual meeting will bring all cohort participants together to learn from national experts. National experts will share knowledge on best practices and innovative ways in which local pathways to employment can be improved.
- **Assessment Visit** (In-Person: June-August)
  - Vera representatives will meet with participants on-location and explore areas where reentry services (both pre- and post-release) are offered across partners, and possible opportunities for growth or innovation, including providing a site-specific analysis of employment trends and legal barriers for people with various conviction types. During this visit, Vera will lead a discussion to identify preliminary strategies and goals to accomplish with stakeholders.

- **Experiential Visit (In-Person: September-November)**
  - Following the Assessment Visit, Vera will work with the lead applicant to develop an itinerary and Experiential Visit plan for stakeholders that connects to the initial priorities identified by stakeholders. Workgroup participants will travel to relevant community sites to gain a greater understanding of the education and job training programs available in prisons, the relevant reentry employment programs, and possible areas of collaboration and development across partners. The visit will end with a debrief and reflection on areas to further explore before the next meeting.
- **Goal Session (Virtual: November)**
  - Vera, the lead applicant, and stakeholders will develop a series of proposals based on the Assessment and Experiential Visits and the priorities identified by stakeholders therein. Vera will facilitate a virtual session with stakeholders to discuss key takeaways and lessons learned; opportunities for collaboration and partnership; remaining challenges and gaps in knowledge; and potential strategies for achieving the priorities identified by stakeholders. The Goal Session will aim to conclude in consensus on 1-3 immediate goals for improving practice and at least one long-term or aspirational goal.
- **Cohort Convening (Virtual: December)**
  - In the final virtual meeting, all FCO participants across the three sites will come together to discuss their experiences, lessons learned, goals, and next steps. National experts will provide feedback in this session, including making recommendations or offering resources to each site as they propose their goals. Each site will have the opportunity to learn from one another and form additional collaborative partnerships and a community of practice.

## **Eligibility**

- Primary applicant may belong to any organization/entity engaged in efforts to provide or support education and employment for justice-impacted people (i.e., corrections agency, governor's office, business organization, community corrections agency, postsecondary institution, nonprofit organization, employer, etc.).
- Key stakeholders identified in the application (both required and optional) must be willing to participate in a workgroup that will engage in all aspects of the program and be able to welcome Vera representatives and workgroup members on location for visits.
  - Required stakeholders include a representative from: corrections agency, reentry service provider (college, community corrections, non-profit organization, governmental office, or other entity), postsecondary institution providing education in a correctional setting, and formerly-incarcerated people or organizations led by formerly-incarcerated people.
  - Optional stakeholders may include representatives from community corrections; the Department of Labor or other job training provider or funder; employer; Chamber of Commerce or other business association; or other government agencies or entities.

- One representative per required stakeholder organization must participate in the Summit, June 8<sup>th</sup> from 12-4pm ET.

### **Selection Criteria**

The weight of certain selection criteria will be adjusted according to the applicant pool to prioritize diversity of engagement of different stakeholders, geographic and other regional characteristics, and other factors across the sites selected. Flexibility in the selection criteria is designed to create opportunities for sites at different stages of development of these projects or partnerships from nascent to established. As such, applicants should not feel discouraged from applying based on existent (or non-existent) reentry partnerships, efforts, policies, laws, etc. in their communities and states. Vera will take the following criteria as well as other contextual factors into consideration:

- Whether proposal questions are thoroughly addressed;
- Interest and excitement demonstrated in proposal;
- Letters of Support from required and/or optional stakeholders;
- Ability for required stakeholder representatives to participate in all remote and in-person activities;
- Organizations and agencies serve or are seeking to serve an area where 50 percent or more of the prison population is returning from incarceration;
- Clean Slate laws or other relevant state laws/policies related to education and employment.

### **Proposal Submissions**

Responses must be sent in a document (Word or PDF) to [anowak@vera.org](mailto:anowak@vera.org) by May 23<sup>rd</sup> at 11:59 PM, local time. In the proposal, please respond to the following questions and prompts with no more than 300 words per each response:

1. What interests you about this opportunity?
2. What region does your application cover?
3. What do you see as strengths and weaknesses in your region's current reentry strategies or practices?
4. What do you see as strengths and weaknesses in your region's current education or job training strategies or practices for justice-impacted people?
5. If you wanted to increase access to in-demand jobs for justice-impacted people, what would be your first step?
6. What do you see as an ideal outcome from improving education and employment connections in your region?
7. Please describe your history collaborating with other partners or stakeholders in the state.
 

Note: The proposal is not negatively impacted if collaborative efforts between stakeholders do not yet exist.

  - a. Departments of Corrections;
  - b. Community corrections (i.e., parole, probation);
  - c. Jails, juvenile facilities, halfway houses, or other confinement or corrections settings;

- d. Non-profit organizations providing reentry supports;
  - e. Colleges or other postsecondary institutions;
  - f. Employers, chambers of commerce, or business associations;
  - g. Directly impacted people or organizations lead by directly impacted people;
  - h. Other stakeholders relevant to your context.
8. Are you and your partners (at least 1 representative from each organization) able to attend the Summit on Thursday, June 8<sup>th</sup> from 12 to 4 pm ET?

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