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TWO-YEAR REGIONAL PLAN UPDATE

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Submitted by: Workforce Development Board of Ventura County

Rebecca Evans, Executive Director

Gregory Liu, Board Chair

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Introduction

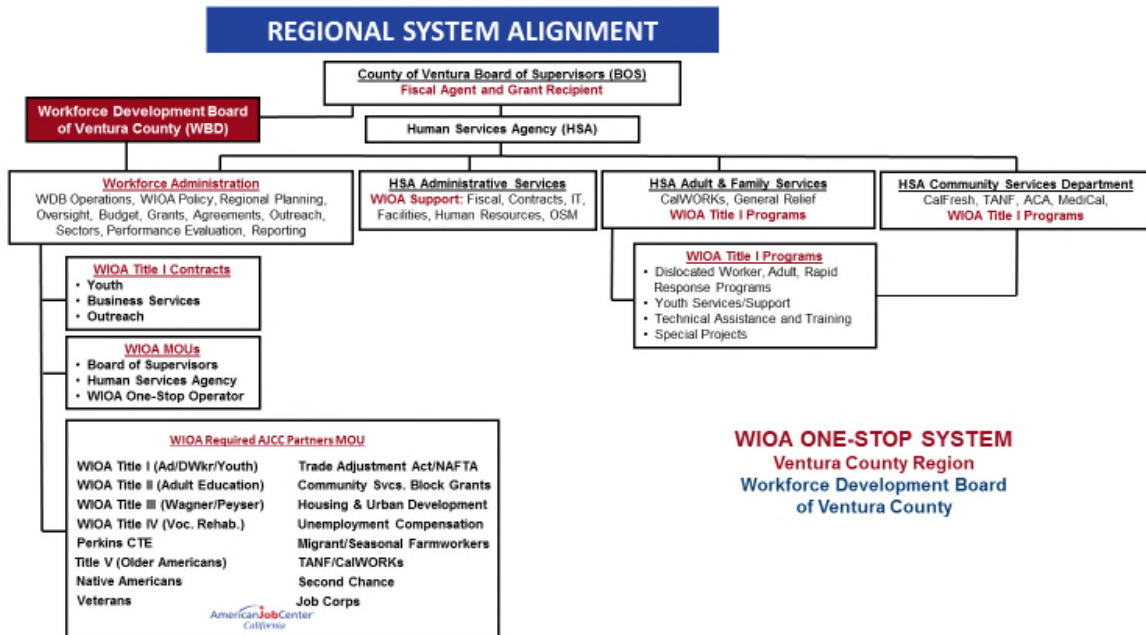
The Ventura County Board of Supervisors is the governing body that oversees the County's Human Services Agency, in which the activities of the Workforce Development Board of Ventura County (WDBVC) are embedded. The WDBVC is a separate, independent board appointed by the Board of Supervisors, and is the Regional Planning Unit for Ventura County. In February 2017, WDBVC submitted a four-year **WIOA Regional Plan** to the California Workforce Development Board. That plan, in tandem with a **WIOA Local Plan** submitted at the same time, outlined the County's vision, objectives and strategies for supporting an appropriately-skilled workforce ready and able to meet the changing business needs of area employers. In the Regional and Local Plans, and consistent with the goals and objectives outlined in the CWDB's State Plan, "*Skills Attainment for Upward Mobility; Aligned Services for Shared Prosperity*," the Board described three primary policy objectives: fostering demand-driven skills attainment by aligning regional education programs with industry sector needs; enabling upward mobility for all Ventura County residents; and aligning, coordinating and integrating programs and services to economize limited resources.

That four-year Regional Plan was developed over a period of six months, with the participation of several dozen agencies and organizations as well as many private individuals, in a total of 75 public meetings. All of those organizations and individuals, and many others, were invited to participate in the development of this update to the Regional Plan. Some participated in a series of focused planning meetings regarding the P2E initiative; others attended an evening meeting to review the plan update process, the State Board's priorities, and new regional collaborations. The result is this **Two-Year Regional Plan Update** which addresses CWDB's guidance and expectations while meeting the County's need to make plan adjustments and modifications in response to conditions in the region.

To augment the stakeholder input collected in the series of meetings described above, WDBVC engaged the services of a consulting firm with particular expertise in re-entry services for justice-involved populations. CauseIMPACTS facilitated six of the planning meetings, compiling and inviting a list of 170 individuals, representing more than 51 unique organizations serving justice-involved individuals in the region. CauseIMPACTS also designed and implemented a stakeholder survey, an employer survey, one-on-one interviews with 21 practitioners, and focus groups with justice-involved individuals.

A detailed description of WDBVC's regional plan update process is included as **Attachment A: Stakeholder Engagement and Community Outreach Efforts**. The Local Board has a strong track record of community engagement, and supports the state's desire to do more than simply comply with public notice requirements. To ensure that the interests of customers were central, the WDBVC utilized the California Workforce Association's approved provider list to identify a consulting firm with specific expertise in community engagement, the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce. The consultant first met with WDBVC staff in November 2018; a series of meetings began the following month, some of them public, some internal working sessions, culminating in an evening public meeting on January 31, 2019, which in turn triggered a 30-day public comment period. WDBVC and its stakeholders view this regional plan update process as a welcome opportunity to connect the workforce and corrections systems in a way that has not been done before. We support the state in this goal, and look forward to working together to make a real difference in the lives of justice-involved residents of Ventura County.

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Workforce-Corrections Partnerships

A number of workforce-corrections partnerships currently exist in Ventura County, most of them focused on a particular program or a specific referral relationship between two or more agencies. The Human Services Agency’s Adult and Family Services Department has long partnered with the Ventura County Probation Agency and the Ventura County Sheriff’s Office to support a series of initiatives aimed at the reintegration of ex-offenders. The **Re-Entry Council**, which originally formed in connection with a Workforce Accelerator Fund grant, has served as the primary vehicle for coordinating many of these efforts.

This Regional Plan Update heralds a new and more comprehensive level of partnership, one which endeavors to bring the workforce development system as a whole in alignment with the needs of all justice-involved Ventura County residents. It incorporates and builds upon existing partnerships, and proposes an expanded, revitalized and staff-supported Re-Entry Council as the centerpiece of a genuinely wholistic workforce-corrections partnership.

The VCWDB is fully committed to not only offering but *targeting* services to those who face the greatest challenges in the labor market. The priority placed on building upward mobility for low-income residents means an emphasis on reaching and serving those with low educational levels and/or limited prior work experience. Women who have not previously worked outside the home are a priority target population. People with criminal records face perhaps the greatest challenges of all in the labor market, with the stigma of incarceration on top of the usual educational barriers, skills deficits, and support

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service needs. As the county’s provider of Medi-Cal, CalFresh and General Relief services, the Human Service Agency is in a position to bring access to those programs and supports to the incarcerated and post-release population.

The new focus on trying to reach the general population of Ventura County CalFresh recipients, discussed in detail in WDBVC’s Local Plan Update, reflects an unprecedented emphasis on targeting workforce services to low-income residents. Individuals who currently have no income, or are working in low-wage jobs, are a priority, and the WDBVC Local Plan Update outlines a strategy of designing and offering “earn and learn” opportunities, such as apprenticeship, OJT and other forms of paid training, as a key response. Similarly, the WDBVC’s P2E Plan incorporates models which provide trainees with income while they are in training. WDBVC sees the commitment to connect the workforce and corrections systems and the commitment to serve low-income residents as part-and-parcel of the same imperative: moving the needle on poverty in Ventura County.

Under the leadership of the Re-Entry Council and the WDBVC, Ventura County has piloted several programs targeting justice-involved individuals, primarily as iterations of the **Specialized Training and Employment Project for Success (STEPS)** program. Historically, between 2016 and 2018, the STEPS programs have averaged a 50% job placement rate. At present, the STEPS-Adult program serves 92 AB109 individuals annually, while the STEPS-Youth program serves another 79 non-AB109 individuals age 16-24.

Given the track record and relationships established over the various incarnations of STEPS, the WDBVC anticipates utilizing a portion of P2E funding (and other new funding that may become available) to continue to build the capacity of the STEPS model. At the same time, there is a widely-recognized need to go beyond STEPS, to offer broader opportunities and to reach more of the non-AB109 population. WDBVC intends to address this by using **an RFP aimed at community-based providers** with a proven track record of connecting this population to employment, and anticipates awarding a significant portion of P2E funding through this process.

Ventura County’s P2E stakeholders have been meeting since August, 2018, and have identified multiple barriers, challenges and needs, including housing for ex-offenders, more sober-living and drug treatment options, more paid training, and more opportunities for direct placement into employment. While there are a number of organizations in the county providing social services and various kinds of hard- and soft-skills training for ex-offenders, there are relatively few that offer paid training, OJT, or direct job placement. In accordance with the P2E Regional Plan, which was prepared in tandem with this regional update and is included as Attachment 4, following the Local Plan Update, the WDBVC and its numerous corrections and community partners are proposing several new initiatives, beginning with an expanded and revitalized Re-Entry Council and financial support for a community-based approach to connecting ex-offenders with employment.

Ex-offenders face many of the same barriers to employment experienced by low-income residents in general (low educational levels, lack of training, lack of work history), as well as additional barriers created by the simple fact of their criminal record. Most employers are reluctant to take a chance on someone with a record. Even something as basic as the lack of a driver’s license, state identification card, or a specific professional license becomes a huge obstacle. To overcome these barriers, ex-offenders need a comprehensive support system of educational enhancement, skills training in high-demand occupations, earn-and-learn opportunities, case management, and support services ranging

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from mental health counseling and housing assistance to transportation and post-placement career guidance.

At present, these services are provided through a handful of relatively small community-based programs and fall short of reaching all of those who could use such assistance. P2E funding gives WDBVC and its corrections partners the opportunity to move beyond individual programs to create a comprehensive *system* which offers workforce and supportive services to each incarcerated individual – while they are still incarcerated – and follows them, via a ‘warm’ hand-off immediately upon release, with all of the supports they are likely to need to be successful on the outside. Ventura County’s P2E proposal includes funding for academic and career counseling, transportation vouchers, books, uniforms, equipment, and assistive technology for people with disabilities. Supportive services must be necessary, reasonable, and employment-related, and will be targeted to those most in need by starting outreach (more accurately: ‘in-reach’) 60-90 days prior to release.

The **State Parole** and **County Probation** offices, partners in the Re-Entry Council for several years, have been actively involved in the development of this Regional Plan Update and the P2E Regional Plan. The state’s focus on using these plans to establish stronger connections between the workforce system and the corrections system presents us with a welcome opportunity to take that partnership to a new level. All of the stakeholders involved in this plan update process agree that providing workforce services to individuals while they are still incarcerated is the best way to ensure success. Certain policies restricting service for “short-timers” currently prevent providers from reaching a significant portion of the incarcerated population, but stakeholders are pursuing modifications to those rules. Even individuals who won’t be incarcerated for long could benefit from meeting with a career counselor, and perhaps participating in a brief work-readiness training. Those who face longer sentences can receive more in-depth educational services or job skills training.

At present, intake and case management needs for the justice-involved population are handled by trained staff at the AJCC, typically as part of the enrollment process for one of the STEPS programs. Individuals are assessed for educational levels, skills, and interests, and are guided toward the program or service that is most appropriate for their needs. Case managers receive records from the corrections facility regarding the education and training each individual received during incarceration, and are able to base an Individual Employment Plan on that foundation.

One gap that has been highlighted during this regional planning process concerns justice-involved individuals who are served by the AJCC, but who are not necessarily enrolled into one of the specific STEPS program targeted to that population. Many justice-involved individuals receive basic career counseling at the AJCC, and are assisted with resumes and pointed toward services and job openings, but are not counted in the totals of justice-involved individuals served, simply because they are not part of STEPS.

In the future, as a result of agreements developed during this plan update process, the AJCC will track all self-identified justice-involved individuals, not just those enrolled in specific re-entry programs, and will share data with partners regarding overall service to the target population. Data regarding all justice-involved individuals will be tracked in accordance with the state’s new performance reporting requirements, and will be shared on an ongoing basis among all partners to ensure accountability and continuous improvement. Data sharing agreements and client release of information will allow Parole

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and Probation to share appropriate data with partners, ensuring that users have access to information as appropriate.

Once a justice-involved individual has been placed in a job, it becomes imperative to protect the investment that has been made in that person by providing them with all of the supportive services they need to be successful. It is critical to follow up with those new employees, and with their employers, on a regular basis to ensure that misunderstandings or minor issues do not become major problems leading to loss of employment. WDBVC knows from experience that a significant number of ex-offenders placed in employment will encounter post-placement workplace or home-life issues, and is committed to assisting both the worker and the employer to ensure a successful transition to long-term employment.

The WDBVC has fully embraced the strategy of focusing on regional industry sectors as a way of meeting employer needs and advancing Ventura County job-seekers. The WDBVC's WIOA Regional Plan outlines four sector committees, which form the backbone of its work to match job-seeker skills and employer needs. These include the **Manufacturing Committee**, the **Clean/Green Committee**, the **Health Care Committee**, and the **Business Services Committee**.

Ventura County's Specialized Training & Employment Project for Success, or **STEPS**, has evolved through various iterations and funding streams over several years. The initial STEPS-Adult (AB109) and STEPS Youth (Youthful Offender Block Grant) programs were funded by the **Probation Department**. The STEPS-Adult program served 132 individuals between July 1, 2017 and November 30, 2018. The STEPS-Youth program served 71 individuals during that same time frame. (At present, the two programs are serving 92 and 79, respectively.)

WDBVC's first **Accelerator** (Workforce Accelerator Fund) grant allowed WDBVC to improve the STEPS-Adult program through a strategic planning process that led to strengthened partnerships. A second Accelerator grant was utilized to develop marketable training services for ex-offenders to improve entry into the labor market by addressing the workforce needs of local manufacturing employers. WDBVC and partners developed a six-week 90-hour fee-based Manufacturing Readiness Skills Training Program at Ventura Community College and explored other funding options to expand the training.

A new funding opportunity eventually became available through **Forward Focus** (AB2060). Stakeholders had determined that ex-offenders required immediate engagement in program services, ongoing employment coaching/counseling and a responsive supportive services system; any significant delay or gap in services negatively impacted their participation. A delay in starting classes, a lack of spouse/family support, a lack of transportation or a long wait list for mental health/drug treatment services contributed directly to the drop-out rate. Those fully engaged in employment or in OJT, however, demonstrated eagerness to learn and stuck with the program. Completion and job placement rates for STEPS have improved over time as the components described above have been added to the model.

STEPS Connections, funded under Accelerator 6.0, expanded prior Accelerator activities from the adult AB109 ex-offender population to include 35 STEPS-Youth participants (16-24) while also bringing in additional partners. STEPS Connections does not independently enroll participants; instead it strengthens partnerships to support an integrated and responsive system for this population, creates tools and resources to strengthen participation and employment outcomes, and has developed a "best practice" guide to share the lessons learned during the project.

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STEPS Connections included funding for a lead Employment Services Specialist who operates as an “ex-offender Navigator” for the system and coordinates with STEPS-Youth and STEPS-Adult, which has been critical in identifying issues and creating strong working relationships, given that STEPS-Youth is located at the Probation office while the navigator works at the America’s Job Center of California (AJCC) and has access to information affecting youth participation. STEPS-Youth provides supportive services and has access to other services as appropriate from the AJCC. STEPS-Youth program staff offer Job Readiness Workshops, case management and other employment services at Probation’s new Youth Day Reporting Center.

STEPS Connections creates a comprehensive and integrated “One Stop” supportive services system for ex-offenders by strengthening provider relationships. The Re-Entry Council, created under the initial WAF 1.0 project and now expanded through this Regional Plan Update process, plays a key role in developing and supporting this system. The members of the council are key stakeholders in positions that can influence system change, including leaders of organizations that fund organizations providing support services to the ex-offender population. Their input in this project, together with that of industry representatives, will play a key role in driving system change. They include the Chief Deputy, Probation; Todd Road Jail Commander, Sheriff’s Department; Field Services Manager, EDD-WS; Director of Workforce Services, Goodwill Industries; Interface Children and Family Services; HSA Manager and Ex-Offender administrator, and representatives from several other nonprofit organizations. Since the ultimate objective is to improve marketable skills for the labor market, employers will continue to have strong representation on the expanded Re-Entry Council. The revamped Council plans to meet bi-monthly, and to hold quarterly cross-training sessions for member organization staff and others on a range of corrections/workforce-related topics.

The Todd Road Jail, operated by the Ventura County Sheriff’s Office and serving male inmates, is currently the site of a successful **food handler training program**. Discussions pursuant to this Regional Plan Update and the drafting of Ventura County’s P2E Regional Plan have resulted in an agreement to utilize P2E funding to enhance that program with additional employer-validated credentialing, and to replicate the model in a new field: **landscaping and grounds maintenance**.

Another need identified during this planning process involves the information provided to ex-offenders describing resources and supports available to them as they re-enter. Stakeholders prioritized the creation of a standard **Re-Entry Toolkit**, to be handed to each individual, with clearly-written materials describing the various programs and services they are entitled to, not just as ex-offenders but as residents of Ventura County. These files and documents will also be backed up in a digital record, allowing individuals to access their paperwork even if they misplace the hard copies. Ex-offenders need to understand that they are not ‘on their own,’ and that there is in fact a system of supports and a network of providers that welcomes them.

Long waitlists and an apparent shortage of approved **sober living options** for ex-offenders, both AB109 and non-AB109, was highlighted as a significant gap during the planning process. At present, only two providers are contracted by the Ventura County Probation Agency, limited to AB109 clients; both generally have long waiting lists. Other options, however, do exist in the community. As a result, WDBVC is proposing, as part of its P2E Regional Plan, a vetting process to expand the list of approved providers through master agreements and micro-contracts with pre-approved vendors.

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WDBVC strongly supports apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship models as a pathway for low-income residents, including ex-offenders, to achieve income mobility. To have value, pre-apprenticeship programs must by definition lead to an approved apprenticeship. Ventura County embraces the **High Road** approach, and currently has one Multi-Craft Core Curriculum program, developed in partnership with the building trades, at the Architecture, Construction & Engineering Charter High School in Camarillo. During the development of this Regional Plan Update, the WDBVC met with multiple unions and Ventura Community College to discuss starting a new MC3 program. The college had already been exploring the idea, and with the support of the unions and the WDBVC, was encouraged to pursue it as an MC3 model. The new pre-apprenticeship program, focused on entry-level residential building skills, will be reviewed by the WDBVC, with an anticipated start date of Spring 2019.

The Community College District is a primary partner in the Ventura County workforce development system, with a heavy emphasis on designing programs that meet employer needs by ensuring students develop the basic and advanced skills required for family-sustaining employment. Integrated education programs, such as the pre-apprenticeship program currently in development, combine literacy, numeracy, civics and job skills in a model that accelerates learning gains. In addition to residential building, occupations include care-giving, entry-level manufacturing/assembly, and a Spanish-language agricultural supervisor training program that incorporates ESL. The community colleges complement the basic education services offered at the Adult Schools by bringing advanced technical instruction to the table, with a commitment to ensuring that all students successfully meet basic English and math standards by the end of their first year of college.

WDBVC conducted extensive, in-depth labor market analysis to identify the sectors it prioritized for workforce development services, and has organized its committee structure around those sectors. The Manufacturing Committee, the HealthCare Committee, the Business Services Committee and the Clean/Green Committee all focus on providing Ventura County job-seekers with the skills needed by employers in those sectors. Board and committee meetings are public, and stakeholders are actively engaged, in an ongoing basis, in reviewing LMI data, verifying it with employers in each sector, and designing services that keep pace with the needs of both sets of customers: job-seekers and employers. Partners receive their information about priority industry sectors through participation in this committee structure, and use the committees to provide input into the Board's decision-making. For example, Ventura Community College has a robust and sophisticated labor-market analysis operation of its own, which it routinely brings to the table in discussions with the Board. Going forward, re-entry placement data, by sector and wage, will be incorporated into regular reports to each of the sector committees.

Successful provision of workforce services to the justice-involved population requires applying an additional lens to our labor market analysis. Identifying high-growth industries with good wages is critical, but it is equally essential to understand the business practices in each sector regarding the hiring of individuals with criminal records. As part of the P2E Regional Plan process, CauseIMPACTS conducted an analysis of labor market data and re-entry challenges for Ventura County and concluded that while some sectors are less corrections-friendly than others, there are significant opportunities to expand employer engagement in this area. Manufacturing and Clean/Green are two sectors where employers have shown a willingness to consider ex-offenders, and are experiencing labor shortages that could work to the benefit of the re-entering population. It is also possible that some good jobs for ex-offenders may be found in industries, such as culinary, that have not been selected as high-growth focus areas by the

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board; it will be important to remain flexible and adaptable in order to take advantage of such opportunities as they arise.

Health care is another sector worth exploring, with many job openings in positions with good wages. Most health care employers, however, have blanket policies against hiring individuals with criminal records. This has the effect of shutting many individuals out of positions they have the aptitude for, jobs they could perform well if given the chance. There are examples in other parts of the country where workforce partners have induced health care employers to adopt more rational and nuanced hiring policies, whereby low-level offenses are not treated the same as violent crimes, and are not cause for automatic rejection. Given the strength of this sector, and the potential it holds for job-seekers, the WDBVC and the Re-Entry Council intend to explore with individual employers, and with the sector as a whole, the possibility of piloting more flexible HR policies in Ventura County. We would welcome the state's leadership on this issue, as it will take a major public challenge to change the business practices of such an enormous industry.

Through its STEPS programs, and related efforts, WDBVC has compiled a list of several dozen employers who have expressed willingness to hire formerly-incarcerated or justice-involved individuals. The number who are actively hiring, of course, is much smaller, and STEPS historically has relied on 8-10 relatively reliable employer partners. Clearly, if the workforce system is to serve more justice-involved job-seekers, it needs to dramatically expand employer outreach. A lengthy list of employers who are theoretically "felon-friendly" is fine, but it is the actual hiring (and retention) of employees that counts. Moreover, while some employers are willing to have it publicly known that they hire ex-offenders, others are willing to make such hires only on the condition that it *not* be made public. What is needed is a strategy for accommodating the wishes of both kinds of employers.

Employer outreach for the P2E planning process highlighted the fact that many businesses are not actually clear about their own hiring policies. Local employers who were part of large chains often did not know their headquarters' official position on hiring people with criminal records. Some employers seemingly assume they cannot hire ex-offenders, and screen them out as a matter of course, without ever having pursued the matter. And as indicated above, many are simply uncomfortable even discussing the topic. However, the economy and the labor market are pushing more employers to rethink their policies, creating potential new opportunities for the population. The combination of low unemployment and high demand makes this the ideal time to educate employers.

This Regional Plan Update, in accordance with the P2E Regional Plan, proposes the creation of a new **Employer Outreach and Marketing** position which will centralize Ventura County's approach to recruiting employers and educating them about the benefits of hiring ex-offenders. At present, multiple organizations conduct their own independent business outreach on behalf of job-seekers with criminal records, sometimes through partners in the workforce system. While loosely connected, these separate approaches are not always effective in assuring lateral partner-to-partner communication or achieving positive employment outcomes, and run the risk of alienating employer partners.

Instead of having multiple agencies and organizations independently approaching the same employers on behalf of re-entering clients, WDBVC proposes to utilize P2E funding to implement an efficient, coordinated and centralized effort which respects the needs, and the valuable time, of our employer partners. Convincing an employer to take a chance on an ex-offender is a prospect that cannot be taken lightly; it requires concerted and thoughtful effort by a highly professional and trusted staff. The

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employer needs to know that the candidates they are considering have been educated, trained and vetted, and that the organization standing behind them will continue to do so well after they are hired.

Appealing to the social conscience of employers has its place, but the real key to engaging significant numbers of employers is convincing them that hiring ex-offenders makes good business sense. Fortunately, there is plenty of evidence indicating that ex-offenders tend to become extremely loyal and highly-valued employees, reducing turnover costs and contributing measurably to the bottom line. Since the best messenger for this kind of news is often another employer, we will utilize employer champions to help their peers understand the tangible benefits of hiring individuals with criminal records.

Included in those benefits, of course, are the state and federal tax incentives, credits and other benefits to which employers who hire ex-offenders are entitled. Most employers do not know about these incentives, and even when they have heard about them, they tend to assume that the bureaucratic ‘red tape’ involved will cost more than it is worth. For example, few employers surveyed are aware of the Department of Labor’s bonding program, which protects employers for the first six months of an ex-offender’s tenure. Again, other employers are probably best-positioned to deliver this message, so we will enlist our current employer partners to help us craft simple, self-explanatory marketing materials.

Multi-Craft Core Curriculum Pre-Apprenticeship Partnerships

The Workforce Development Board of Ventura County strongly supports the state’s emphasis on apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship models as vehicles for residents to achieve income mobility. By definition, pre-apprenticeship only works if it is connected to actual apprenticeship opportunities; otherwise, it is not really “pre-apprenticeship.” Ventura County embraces the Multi-Craft Core Curriculum model, and currently has a strong MC3 program, developed in partnership with the International Brotherhood of Electrical workers and related trades, which operates at the Architecture, Construction & Engineering Charter High School in Camarillo, moving Ventura County residents into living wage apprenticeships leading to well-paid journeyman positions.

In June of 2018, the WDBVC met with the Laborers International Union, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and the Community College District to discuss starting a new MC3 program. The community colleges had been exploring something similar, and with the encouragement of the unions and the WDBVC, were convinced to pursue it under the Multi-Craft Core Curriculum. The new program will focus on entry-level residential building skills, with an English-Language Learner component. The unions have worked with the community colleges over the past several months to collect the required information from the various building trades. The new pre-apprenticeship program will be reviewed by the WDBVC shortly and is anticipated to start this Spring.

On behalf of both MC3 programs, the WDBVC and its partners will focus on recruiting participants from underrepresented populations such as women, veterans and justice-involved individuals. Going forward, the Board will remain engaged with the MC3 programs and their labor partners to ensure that the

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workforce system fully supports the apprenticeship model, and that participants have access to all of the services to which they are entitled.

Regional Coordination and Alignment Indicators

As both a local workforce area and a region, Ventura County is perhaps spared some of the complexities faced by multi-county regions, as well as by counties containing multiple workforce boards.

Nevertheless, the regional planning process that WDBVC has engaged in, starting with passage of WIOA and continuing through the implementation of Regional Planning Units, has pushed the Board to think more regionally, and to address itself to the broader systemic questions raised in the ongoing regional planning process.

An updated Indicators of Regional Coordination and Alignment document is attached. It suggests that while Ventura County, by virtue of having worked collectively on things like sector strategies for many years, is ahead of the curve in some areas, there is still work to be done on other aspects of regionalization.

For example, the regional plan update process has highlighted the fact that while job quality has been a concern of the WDBVC for many years, as reflected in numerous programmatic decisions and priorities, the Board does not have a comprehensive job quality policy. The discussions around justice-involved individuals, CalFresh recipients, and other low-income county residents pursuant to this plan update have likewise sparked conversations about whether WDBVC should establish, as a region, specific target populations beyond the broad priority-of-service populations specified in WIOA.

It is worth noting that WDBVC does regularly partner with our contiguous regions. For example, Ventura County is a partner in the Los Angeles region's Slingshot initiative, focused as it is on one of our key industries, health care. Many of our services reach into Santa Barbara/Mid-Coast Region, and some of our residents participate in programs there. Notably, the nearest day-reporting center for adult probationers is located in Santa Barbara, requiring ex-offenders to travel there on a regular basis – a situation the WDBVC can partner in efforts to remedy.

Other Changes to Regional Plans

No other changes to the current four-year regional plan are contemplated. The devastating Woolsey and Hill fires have had a major impact on county services in general, and on the activities of the Workforce Development Board, but it is too soon to know the exact impact on the local/regional economy or labor market.

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Appendix A: Community Engagement and Outreach

The Workforce Development Board of Ventura County strongly supports the efforts of the California Workforce Development Board to not just comply with but in fact exceed the requirement of the Brown Act. Stakeholder engagement in the Regional Plan Update process began early, in June 2018, with a convening of corrections partners by the WDBVC to discuss the Prison to Employment planning process. That led to the engagement of CauseIMPACTS to conduct a community planning process, as well as the engagement of Corporation for Skilled Workforce to bring that corrections partnership work into the Regional Plan Update process. For nearly six months, from November to March, the two consulting firms worked to together to ensure broad stakeholder input and consistency across the various planning documents.

A planning meeting with the AJCC Director and staff of the STEPS Program took place on December 11th. It was followed on January 9th by a kick-off meeting of more than 40 corrections, workforce and community stakeholders, the first of several “P2E Partner Coalition” meetings. CauseIMPACTS conducted intensive outreach for this series of sessions, contacting more than 140 organizations, including those provided by CWDB. Numerous individual phone calls and reminders were used to ensure attendance and participation by each category of partner outlined in the state directive, including CDCR/State Parole, Ventura County Sheriff’s Office/County Probation, training providers, other local service providers, labor unions, community colleges, and community-based organizations. Several employers attended the kick-off meeting and participated in subsequent workforce/corrections conversations.

The next meeting of the corrections-workforce coalition group was on January 30th. The following evening, January 31st, a public meeting was held at the AJCC to outline both the Regional and Local Plan updates for interested parties; an email invitation was sent to 3,832 individuals, organizations and employers. Because the local and regional planning processes were held in tandem, stakeholders such as the Division of Child Support Services and CalFresh were able to participate in both, adding important voices to the discussion of serving justice-involved individuals and low-income residents in general.

The Re-Entry Council met on February 6th, with a presentation by CauseIMPACTS on the regional planning work. A ‘Town Hall’ meeting devoted specifically to the workforce-corrections partnership was held on February 13th, with invitations sent to 3,743 individuals, organizations and employers. On March 6th, the final public meeting was held prior to plan submission. As the attached notices indicate, the State Board was informed of all public meetings. Throughout this intensive planning process, multiple draft documents were produced and reviewed by stakeholders and other interested parties, who were given various opportunities to vote on priorities.

In addition to the meetings described above, stakeholders were engaged by means of a stakeholder survey, an employer survey, a focus group of justice-involved individuals, and individual interviews with service providers and corrections officials. These conversations added depth to the planning process, and identified several new opportunities for collaboration. In total, 91 individuals representing 51 unique organizations participated in the regional planning process.

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Appendix B: Workforce/Corrections Partnership

[Note: much of the material included in this Appendix is derived from WDBVC’s **Prison to Employment Regional Plan**, which is included in its entirety as the final Appendix to this combined Regional and Local Plan Update document.]

As noted in the Prison to Employment legislation and elsewhere, the term “*justice involved*” refers to *individuals who are on parole, probation, mandatory supervision, or post-release community supervision and are supervised by or are under the jurisdiction of, a county or the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. This also includes individuals who are on county informal probation, county deferred entry of judgement, or any other county diversion programs such as drug courts, veterans courts, community courts or other specialty courts.*” There are nearly 34,000 actively justice-involved individuals in Ventura County. In addition, there are an estimated 42,000 formerly-incarcerated individuals living in the county, bringing the potential overall target population to approximately 76,000. Since the stigma of incarceration is real and long-lasting, it is critical to focus on both groups.

- **33,561** actively justice-involved individuals in Ventura County
- Extrapolating from national figures, an estimated **42,000** “formerly incarcerated” individuals
- **76,000 currently or formerly justice-involved** individuals in Ventura County

The vast majority of actively justice-involved individuals are already living in the community, including 737 on active state parole, 26,165 on County probation, and 3,175 in County diversion programs. Adults on probation comprise the single largest justice-involved subpopulation in the County, accounting for 76% of the total figure. An additional 3,850 individuals from Ventura County are currently detained, including 1,662 in County jail and 1,822 in CDCR state prison facilities. The table on the next page summarizes data on the size of the current justice-involved population in Ventura County. Analysis of the size and demographic characteristics of Ventura’s justice-involved population reveals a number of interesting trends:

- **79%** of the active justice-involved population are adults on probation
- **76%** of justice-involved individuals in Ventura County are men
- **60%** of the justice-involved population are Hispanic and/or White men of prime working age (25-50 years old)

The majority of the justice-involved individuals in Ventura County are adults between the ages of 25-50 years old (66%), followed by 18-24 year-olds (16%). These groups represent individuals of prime working age who are a potential source of employees for local businesses looking to address labor shortages.

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- **African-Americans and Latinos/Hispanics are noticeably overrepresented** compared to their percentage of the general population:
 - African-Americans make up 2.3% of the overall population in Ventura County, but account for 4.7% of the justice-involved population.
 - Hispanics/Latinos make up 42% of the county population, but account for 62% of the justice-involved population.

Justice-Involved Population in Ventura County			
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Youth</i>	<i>Adults</i>
<i>On Diversion</i>			
In County Diversion Programs	3,175	466	2,709
<i>On Supervision</i>			
On Probation	26,165	610	25,555
On Parole	737	0 ¹	737 ¹
<i>In Detention</i>			
In County Jail (Detention only)	1,662	85 ²	1,577 ²
In State Prison	1,822	7 ²	1,815 ³
TOTAL Justice-Involved	33,561	1,168	32,393

All data is for 2018 calendar year, via data reported to causeIMPACTS, Jan 2019, unless indicated.

[1] As of Dec 2018 via CDCR DAPO figures reported to causeIMPACTS, Dec 2018. Note, there are no youth on parole in the state of California. All juvenile offenders released from DJJ facilities go to County probation agencies

[2] As of Dec 2016 via CJCJ raw data files at <http://casi.cjcj.org/about.html#download>

[3] As of Feb 2019 via CDCR Office of Research reported to causeIMPACTS, Feb 2019.

The majority of justice-involved individuals are from Oxnard, the county’s most populous city. Adult probationers account for nearly 80% of the 32,393 justice-involved adults in Ventura County. The majority are on formal probation, as opposed to AB-109 realignment sentence types such as Post-Release Community Supervision or Mandatory Supervision. After Probation, the next largest category is Diversion, at 8% of justice-involved adults. The County Superior Court offers a number of diversion opportunities for those with minor criminal convictions. In 2018, there were 2,709 adults in Diversion or “deferred entry” in Ventura County, including 74 on work-release programs and 93 in Veterans Court.

The majority of justice-involved individuals in Ventura County (76%) are men. Hispanics (54%) and Caucasians (37%) constitute the majority of the population. Racial minority groups are overrepresented

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in both County and state corrections systems. African Americans make up only 2.3% of the county's population, but 4.7% of the justice-involved population – more than double their representation in the general population. Likewise, individuals of Hispanic/Latino heritage make up 42% of the county's population, but 62% of the justice involved population. The majority (66%) of the justice-involved population in Ventura County are adults between the ages of 25-50, followed by 18-24 year-olds (16%) – individuals of prime working age, and a potential source of workers for employers facing labor shortages.

There are over 1,100 justice-involved youth in Ventura County, accounting for 3.5% of the total justice involved population. Consistent with state and national trends, the juvenile justice-involved population in Ventura County has decreased significantly in recent years. Between 2008 and 2016, the number of juvenile arrests, probation-involved youth, and the population in juvenile detention all decreased by more than 50%. The majority of justice-involved juveniles in Ventura County are under County supervision or diversion.

As of December 2018, there were 466 youth in county diversion programs. There were 479 youth committed to County facilities in 2018, including commitment to both juvenile halls and camps. Most of those committed were not incarcerated long-term. Very few youth from Ventura County are detained in state Department of Juvenile Justice facilities, and there are no youth on parole in the county, as all youth released from state supervision are released to the County Probation Agency.

These data suggest a number of needs and barriers that must be addressed in order to achieve successful re-entry. A good job, of course, is paramount. Individuals are almost always in need of immediate income upon leaving incarceration. While it may be necessary for some to start with a relatively low-wage, part-time, or temporary position, it is essential that they move fairly quickly into the kind of job that allows them to support themselves, and often a family as well. Failure to access such a career path is likely to lead to recidivism. Similarly, paid training – whether apprenticeship, OJT, or another type of earn-and-learn model – will need to be a cornerstone of reaching the justice-involved population.

Ex-offenders, as the data show, reflect a broad range of demographics, and are likely to have many of the same issues and challenges faced by low-income job-seekers in general. Added to this, however, is the stark transition from being incarcerated to being out in society, compounded by the stigma much of society places on those with criminal records. Re-entering individuals, therefore, require very focused and hands-on support as they make that transition. They need to begin receiving services and guidance while still incarcerated, and that support needs to move alongside them as they re-enter society. Ideally, they should go directly from jail or prison to a re-entry service provider's office. As one provider put it: "Even a weekend can be fatal." Those providers must then closely track the individual's progress for several months, as they find housing, receive services, obtain employment, and attempt to meet employer expectations. Providers need to follow-up with employers regularly to ensure things are going well, and must be ready to intervene on behalf of the employer when they are not. Individuals who out of necessity may have started out in a low-wage job must be offered assistance in taking the next step toward a sustainable career.

CDCR projects that there will be **576 individuals released to Ventura County from state prison during calendar year 2019**. This represents a dramatic decrease from the average of 1,900 per year prior to realignment, but is still a significant number of felony offenders in need of re-entry services. The

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demographics suggest that there is a pronounced need for programs and services that can connect large numbers of justice-involved individuals with well-paid employment. This will require increasing the number of employers who are willing to take a chance on an ex-offender, and significantly expanding those programs that are able to connect ex-offenders to employment. In order to do this successfully, however, it will also be necessary to build a continuum of support services, starting during incarceration and continuing well after release, to ensure that each individual has the help they need to make the transition from prison to a career.

The process of requesting, collecting, retrieving, and analyzing corrections data is time intensive and convoluted. There are multiple agencies that hold pieces of the data, prohibitive rules about data sharing, and antiquated data systems. Further complicating the analysis, data is also not easily shared across county departments, or within the state across jurisdictional lines. The Probation Department and CDCR complied with data requests for this update, but the collection process highlighted a few key needs. Corrections departments and the courts need a centralized, shared database through which they can track, collect, and report data. Corrections partners have been encouraged to collect and track a few additional data points, such as education level and employment status.

Employment is the key to reducing recidivism among justice-involved individuals. Unfortunately, limited real-time data on employment trends among the justice-involved population of Ventura County are available. Both CDCR-DAPO and the County Probation Department reported that they do not have reliable figures on the employment and unemployment rates of people in supervision, as this data is not always updated in real-time to the central reporting system by individual officers. For example, CDCR-DAPO reported that 137 of 737 (18.6%) active parolees in Ventura County were unemployed in December 2018. This conservative estimate is already over four times higher than the current Ventura County unemployment rate of 3.8%. The true disparity is likely even greater.

Enhanced data collection and reporting on employment rates can help make a case for workforce training and programming. Moreover, this kind of data will be essential in the evaluation of existing and future workforce programs for the justice-involved. More resources must be dedicated to providing justice-involved individuals with access to upward mobility jobs in Ventura County in order to improve such outcomes. As the county's labor force continues to slowly decrease and the labor needs of local industry continue to grow, the justice-involved population represents a key untapped pool of local talent that can help meet the demands of regional industry and address some of the county's overarching workforce challenges.

As noted in the plan update narrative, the AJCC has not historically tracked justice-involvement for all customers. Individuals referred into a specific re-entry program, such as STEPS, are entered as justice-involved in CalJobs, but ex-offenders who do not end up in a re-entry program are not tracked or counted as justice-involved. This makes it impossible to give an accurate assessment of the extent to which the workforce system, writ large, is serving the justice-involved population. We know such individuals are being served, in resume workshops, work readiness programs, and individual career counseling, in part because many of them self-identify, but we cannot currently say how many are served each year. We can say that the **STEPS-Adult program is serving 92** justice-involved individuals, and the **STEPS -Youth program 79**, but that is only one slice of the AJCC's service to justice-involved individuals. An average of 50% of participants in these programs have historically been placed in employment.

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The expansion anticipated under P2E will allow us to serve non-AB109 populations, which is expected to bring that rate closer to, for example, the overall 78% job placement rate achieved by the Manufacturing Readiness Skills Training program. Going forward, this information will be collected and tracked for all customers who indicate justice-involvement, and reviewed by the WDBVC and its committees.

The expanded and revamped **Re-Entry Council** will be the vehicle through which workforce and corrections partners will facilitate information-sharing to evaluate need and ensure progress on outcomes. The regional plan update process, and the prospect of P2E funding, has brought partners together in a way that is unprecedented, and we will continue that momentum through the Re-Entry Council in the future.

As noted in the narrative, Ventura County is proposing to use P2E funding to create a new position which will **centralize employer outreach and marketing for justice-involved individuals**. The goal is to avoid having the same handful of re-entry-friendly employers being contacted multiple times by multiple parties. Expanding the number of willing employers will be critical; this requires educating them about the various opportunities available to them: the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, the state's New Employment Tax Credit, federal bonding offered by EDD. Employers also need to be educated about their obligations under the Fair Chance Hiring act and other laws affecting the hiring of ex-offenders. Employers who have successfully hired and retained ex-offenders will be enlisted in helping other employers understand the further benefits of hiring this population, including the well-documented fact that workers who feel that someone has 'taken a chance' on them are likely to develop a strong loyalty and commitment to that employer, reducing turnover, increasing retention, and positively impacting the bottom line.

The new P2E plan also includes developing an **active catalog of willing employers**. At present, there is a fairly long list of area employers who are theoretically 'felon-friendly,' most of whom are not actively hiring ex-offenders. At the same time, there are approximately eight employers who consistently hire graduates of the STEPS program; other programs have developed their own handful of willing employers. What is needed is a list of several dozen employers who are actually hiring ex-offenders. This will require strong employer outreach to identify friendly employers who may not yet be on our radar but who do have a history of hiring ex-offenders; a number of area restaurants, for example, are likely to fall into this category. It will also require identifying those potentially-friendly employers who can be convinced if provided with some information and assistance in accessing the tax credits and bonding described above. Discretion will be important, as not all willing employers will be comfortable having the general public know that they hire ex-offenders.

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Appendix C: Regional Coordination and Alignment Indicators

DEMAND-DRIVEN SKILLS ATTAINMENT INDICATORS

Indicator A: Region has a team that jointly convenes industry

Assessment Level: As a single-county local workforce area and region, Ventura County has some distinct advantages in regional coordination, along with some unique challenges. WDBVC has adopted a robust sector strategy, with strong industry champions and employer-led board committees in Health Care, Advanced Manufacturing, Business Services, and Clean/Green industries, including active participation by relevant education, training and service providers, as well as organized labor. As such, the region meets the **Growing/Expanding/Scaling** level.

Indicator B: Region has shared sector/occupation focus and shares/pools resources to meet demand in region.

Assessment Level: Again, Ventura County's one-board region means that it has been working toward this goal for a number of years. Sector committees are indeed business-led, in all four targeted industry sectors. In Health Care, WDBVC has worked as part of the Los Angeles Slingshot partnership to expand the Care Coordinator training program in Ventura County. Colleges and training providers are working with the Board and committees to address the needs of employers, although we still have a ways to go in this regard. Job quality has been a focus; a common tool has not yet been devised. We assess ourselves as being at the lower end of **Growing/Expanding/Scaling**, with some work yet to be done.

Indicator C: Region has a process to communicate industry workforce needs to supply-side partners.

Assessment Level: Ventura County considers itself to be **Operationalizing/Doing** in this category. Partners do have processes to identify and communicate workforce needs, and to orient staff regarding the four industry sector strategies; the AJCC and its partners do offer appropriate work-readiness services. However, work remains to be done to ensure that all supply-side partners actual understand, incorporate and act upon the information provided. Job quality needs to be addressed in a more comprehensive and detailed manner.

Indicator D: Region has policies supporting equity and strives to improve job quality

Assessment Level: Again, Ventura County is in the **Operationalizing/Doing** level in this category. While equity and job quality are long-standing goals, they have not been fully articulated into comprehensive policy. The WDBVC established a self-sustaining wage rate of \$27.85 per hour for individuals (\$15.00 in OJT), but has not defined an across-the board job quality policy. Despite this, business engagement staff do pay attention to job quality in assessing employers.

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UPWARD MOBILITY AND EQUITY INDICATORS

Indicator E: *Region has shared target populations of emphasis*

Assessment Level: Ventura County assess itself to be in the **Learning/Experimenting** phase of this category. While the region targets all of the various priority populations identified in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, it has not identified more specific target populations. This Regional Plan Update process, however, has sparked conversations about the targeting of services to justice-involved individuals and low-income food assistance recipients as a means of impacting poverty. These discussions now need to move into the operationalizing/doing phase.

Indicator F: *Region deploys shared/pooled resources to provide services, training, and education, to meet target population needs*

Assessment Level: Ventura County considers itself to be in the **Operationalizing/Doing** stage of development in this regard. While significant pooling of resources occurs in the operation of the AJCC, that depth of collaboration does not yet extend more widely in the workforce development system. However, discussions are underway, for example with CalFresh and corrections partners, about the possibility of pooling resources in the future.

Indicator G: *Region utilizes shared, common case management strategies such as co-enrollment, navigators, and/or multi-disciplinary teams to develop shared responsibility for providing services and ensuring quality outcomes*

Assessment Level: With its emphasis on customer-centered design, training for front-line staff, and genuine partner involvement, Ventura County sees itself as being in the **Growing/Expanding/Scaling** stage of development in this category. Multi-disciplinary partners share case management strategies, including co-enrollment, in order to provide career navigation support for job seekers, and as such, share responsibility for achieving high-quality outcomes.

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SYSTEM ALIGNMENT INDICATORS

Indicator H: *Region has shared/pooled admin systems and/or processes for achieving administrative efficiencies and program outcomes*

Assessment Level: As a one-county region/local workforce area, it is a bit difficult to place Ventura County in this category. The region does indeed have a formal structure in place, and does not require a new regional administrative intermediary. However, opportunities for regional administrative efficiencies do exist, and are under discussion. For this reason, Ventura County considers itself to be in the **Operationalizing/Doing** level for this category. Partners are using CalJobs for regional training coordination.

Indicator I: *Regional decision-making in formalized structures*

Assessment Level: Again, as a one-county region, Ventura County has an advantage in this regard. A formal decision-making structure is in place, with strong industry champions and the input of organized labor and workforce service providers. Ventura County is in the **Growing/Expanding/Scaling** stage of regional development in this regard.

Indicator J: *Regional organization and evaluation of performance*

Assessment Level: Ventura County places itself in the **Operationalizing/Doing** level of this category. Regional partners do meet on a regular basis to discuss the work, but are only beginning to use the regional coordination indicators to assess the status of our regional work. Work remains to be done to help partners who have been working together for years as a local workforce area to see themselves as part of a regional strategy as well.