

EMPLOYING OFFENDERS IN SAN FRANCISCO:

A SECTOR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LAW CENTER

The National Economic Development and Law Center, established in 1969, is a non-profit public interest law and planning organization that specializes in community economic development. It works in collaboration with community organizations, private foundations, corporations and government agencies to build the human, social, and economic capacities of low-income communities and their residents. NEDLC helps to create both strong, sustainable community institutions that can act as "change agents," and an effective local infrastructure for their support.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In partnership with the San Francisco District Attorney, Terence Hallinan, and his staff, the National Economic Development and Law Center undertook this research project in the spring of 2002 in order to help guide the development of industry-specific workforce development programs that can provide good wages and/or career advancement opportunities for criminal offenders. While this research examines the experiences of ex-felons, the research, related issues, and proposed strategies discussed herein are relevant to work with other criminal offenders.

This report is a collaborative effort funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and spearheaded by the San Francisco District Attorney's Office (SFDA) and the National Economic Development and Law Center (NEDLC). The SFDA's Office will use this research to inform its Street to Work initiative. This new initiative is an employment-based alternative to incarceration for first-time, low-level drug dealers aged 18-30, in which successful program participants will have the felony conviction waived from their records. NEDLC guided this research based on its extensive background in workforce development and "Sector" (or industry-specific) employment strategies.

What Are Sector Employment Initiatives?

NEDLC used a Sector research methodology to collect and analyze the data presented in this report. Sector initiatives are industry-specific economic and workforce development efforts that seek to achieve win-win outcomes by building the competitiveness of a target industry while simultaneously benefiting low-income workers and job seekers. The research process, which is a major component in the development of sector initiatives, involves reviewing demographic and labor market information, as well as conducting focus groups. The data gathered are then used to choose a target industry that meets specific criteria including accessibility to the target population, demand for workers, high wages, and potential career ladders. These data also help an initiative understand and make connections in the target population and industry, which provide the basis for essential partnerships with the community, employers, and training providers. These partnerships make Sector initiatives work. The methodology described here should prove useful for Sector-based strategies and other types of employment initiatives with offenders nationwide.

Target Population

This research report aims to highlight the unique barriers to employment that criminal offenders face as well as opportunities for addressing these barriers. In examining demographic data from a sample of 171 ex-felons¹, the following profile of the target population begins to emerge:

- There is a lack of accurate data about ex-felons.
- According to the Self-Sufficiency Standard for San Francisco County², 64% of ex-felons do not earn enough to afford living alone, and only 8% earn enough to support a school-age

¹ These ex-felons were participants in programs of the San Francisco Sheriff's Office and the Northern California Service League.



child. On average, ex-felons' wages are well below those of other San Francisco County residents.

- The ex-felon population is about 48% African-American, with the next-largest groups being Latinos (22%) and non-Latin whites (16%).
- 25% of the ex-felons in our sample did not have a high school diploma or GED and 83% had never attended college. In contrast, only 32% of San Francisco County residents have never attended college.

Industry Information

One of the main objectives of sector research is to identify a target industry for implementing a sector employment initiative. To define industries, this research uses the Standard Industry Classification (SIC) system, which groups “Electrical Works” and “Concrete Work” under a larger industry, in this case “Special Trade Construction”, which in turn is grouped under a sector, “Construction”.

The ability of felons to access jobs in an industry was deemed most important in terms of the criteria for a target industry because of the legal barriers offenders face in many industries. For this reason, data on the employment histories of ex-felons were used to determine which industries were most accessible. Social Services, Eating and Drinking Places, and Special Trade Construction were the most accessible industries (based on the highest concentration of ex-felon employees). Due to the poor wages and limited career ladders in Eating and Drinking Places, Social Services and Special Trade Construction were identified as the most promising industries. Further research on the characteristics of the two potential target industries, Social Services and Special Trade Construction, resulted in the following information.

1. **High demand:** Both industries have a variety of high-demand occupations. In Special Trade Construction, Painters and Paperhangers and Electricians have the most projected openings. In Social Services, Human Service Workers and Preschool Teachers have the highest numbers of projected openings.
2. **Self-sufficiency wages:** In San Francisco County, the self-sufficiency wages most relevant to offenders were the cost of living for an adult living alone (\$10.78 per hour) and for an adult supporting one school-age child (\$17.07 per hour). Special Trade Construction generally offers much higher wages than the Social Services industry. Both have self-sufficiency level wages in some high-demand occupations, particularly for adults without children.
3. **Educational requirements:** Many high-demand occupations in each industry require on-the-job training, rather than a college degree. Special Trade Construction is particularly open to people without degrees.
4. **Mobility:** Special Trade Construction has excellent career ladders. In Social Services, an employee in a job requiring short-term training may have a more difficult time moving up without going back to school for a Bachelor's degree.

Focus Group Findings

²The Self-Sufficiency Standard is based on a calculation of the wage that a particular size and type of family in a specific geographic region must earn to cover basics such as food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, childcare and transportation. Source: Wider Opportunities for Women, California Self-Sufficiency Standard, San Francisco County, November 2000.

During the next step of the research, more detailed qualitative information about the target population and about each industry was gathered through a series of focus groups with 20 San Francisco ex-felons working in the potential target industries and representatives of 12 employers from the industries. Findings from the qualitative examination of the two industries are briefly summarized on the following pages.

Ex-Offenders

Focus groups with members of the target population who had employment experience in Social Services or Special Trade Construction revealed the following.

- In Social Services, ex-felons generally like their jobs, but find the pay too low and the work stressful. They earn approximately half what Construction workers earn. Most would prefer to find jobs in other industries, but they were concerned that their records would preclude them from these opportunities.
- Most of the ex-felons in Special Trade Construction plan to stay in the industry. They like their jobs and their wages, with the main downsides being the industry's seasonal changes in demand for workers and the difficulty in getting enough union job assignments.
- Ex-felons find that their criminal records do not generally cause problems in either industry. However, in Social Services ex-felons must remain "clean" for a while before they can access many jobs.
- Primary challenges to finding and maintaining employment include meeting parole/probation requirements, finding safe transportation, dealing with substance abuse issues, and lack of support services. Childcare and discrimination do not present challenges to most ex-felons in these industries.
- Both industries provide good benefits and access to training. Participants see potential for advancement, particularly with the help of mentors in the industry.
- Participants in the Construction group had access to subsidized training through unions and were interested in participating in order to advance. Social Services participants would be interested in affordable training with a hands-on focus, if it would lead to a better job.
- Participants in the Social Services industry looked for up to six months after life skills training/rehabilitation to find jobs. In the Trades, the search was more likely to last one to four months after leaving prison.
- In both industries, personal networks were the preferred way to find employment, followed by unions and community-based organizations in the Construction industry and classifieds/job listings in the Social Services industry.

Social Services Employers

A focus group with Social Services employers revealed the following.

- Social Services employers generally do not discriminate against ex-felons, particularly if the applicant has been out of prison for a while. Occupations that had legal or contractual restrictions about hiring ex-felons were the exception.



- Work experience and dedication to the organization's client population are generally more important than training and educational requirements. Employers also look for the ability to show up on time.
- Entry-level jobs pay \$8-\$15 per hour and provide benefits after one to six months. Most organizations do not have internal advancement systems, but they do work with employees to access training.
- Social Services employers recruit primarily through online and newspaper postings, as well as through referrals from job training programs (including their own programs).
- Many ex-felons feel pressure to find a job soon after release, making quick placement important for the success of an employment program.

Special Trade Construction Employers

A focus group with Special Trade Construction employers revealed the following.

- Occupations in all the trades are open to ex-felons, and these employers do not ask about criminal history.
- Once a worker has met the basic requirements of the union (which includes a GED), he or she automatically has access to good wages, benefits, and advancement training.
- The hiring process may be slow, and the time between entering the union and finding regular work can also be significant. Construction work is seasonal, with November to March being slow.
- The employers interviewed recruit from the unions and non-profit or public job training and referral programs.
- Entry-level jobs pay \$14-\$17 per hour. After finishing apprenticeship programs, construction workers can earn \$35-\$42 per hour.
- Poor attitude and substance abuse are the primary reasons employers reject job applicants. All employers interviewed conduct drug screening as part of the hiring process.

Recommendations

The recommendations and possible sector strategies identified here were developed on the basis of the research findings outlined above. A more detailed implementation strategy remains to be developed by a group of local stakeholders including employers from the target industry.

In the Special Trade Construction industry, offenders are most in need of assistance to ensure yearlong employment, while employers need thoroughly trained employees, particularly in some of the higher-skilled trades. In the Social Services industry, offenders need help moving up career ladders and finding jobs with higher wages. Employers in the Social Services industry need employees who are experienced and dedicated to their work. The following recommendations and strategies build on these fundamental needs.

1. **Make soft skills and other training more attractive.** In both industries, it is important to have soft skills such as the ability to show up consistently, a good attitude about work, and communications skills. Ex-felons wanted training to be very practical (preferably hands-on) and in a single location. Due to the need to find placements quickly (see the following recommendation), initial training should be short-term, with a focus on job search skills. Training (particularly GED and basic skills for those who don't have these) should be a required part of an employment program in order to encourage participation. Preferably, an employment program should either pay participants a stipend or be free-of-charge and offer transportation assistance, food, and other incentives.
2. **Place participants quickly.** Some ex-felons may be under pressure from transitional services to find a job quickly after release. Others may simply lose patience with the job search, and go back to the easy money available through a criminal lifestyle. An employment program might partner with a temporary employment agency, operate an in-house job placement agency, or set up a sheltered work environment (although moving employees from such programs into mainstream work is challenging and would need special attention). Internships could be another way for offenders to learn while being employed, and would fit with offenders' wish for training to be hands-on.
3. **Match felons with mentors.** Ex-felons in both industries said that mentors, both in and outside their industries, were vital to helping them understand their work and maintain legitimate work during "rough periods". In Social Services, ex-felons said that mentors in the industry would help them identify career paths and training opportunities as well as potential jobs.
4. **Advocate for ex-felons with drug courts and probation/parole officers.** Although employers in the focus groups didn't mention any problems, ex-felons in both focus groups cited difficulties scheduling appointments around training and work. An employment program could focus on working with drug courts and probation/parole officers to address these issues. If that failed, the program could work with employers to help them understand the difficulties. It may be that employers are more open to working around required appointments than ex-felons believe them to be.
5. **Address substance abuse issues.** Employers and ex-felons in both industries mentioned substance abuse as a major barrier to finding and retaining employment. Participants should be screened carefully for substance abuse, and those with substance abuse problems should be required to undergo intensive and ongoing treatment and supervision if they are to move successfully into long-term, stable employment.
6. **Provide flexible transportation supports.** Ex-felons in both groups identified transportation as a barrier to training and employment. In the Construction group, public transportation was not an option due to off-hours schedules and distant workplaces. In Social Services, some participants found the public transportation system dangerous during the hours they traveled. A flexible assistance program offering a range of resources – gas cards, assistance obtaining a driver's license, a centralized database of local residents interested in carpooling or in trading car repair for other services, etc. – could be developed. Other possible strategies to explore include accessing car ownership programs where available, expansion of the car/commute share programs and creation of vanpools from the residential areas to central (and safer) locations on the public transit line.

In addition to the general recommendations listed above, there are two additional recommendations that relate specifically to the Social Services industry.



1. **Work to raise wages by helping incumbent workers advance into higher-paying jobs and researching and educating organizations about incentive programs they are eligible for.** Ex-felons working in the Social Services industry have difficulty surviving on their salaries. In order to retain offenders in the industry, it will be necessary to help them access upgrade training (possibly including getting a Bachelor's degree) and the kinds of experience they need for higher-paying work. Additionally, the program could help raise wages by educating non-profit employers about incentive programs for hiring ex-offenders they may be able to benefit from.
2. **Improve the connection between offenders and job announcements/openings.** Ex-felons in the Social Services group reported spending up to six months looking for work. Employers in this industry use online postings and classifieds and some referrals through job training and placement agencies, while ex-felons say they are most able to find jobs through personal networks. An employment program will need to teach ex-offenders to respond more effectively to job announcements posted online and in newspapers. The program should also advertise itself to employers as a source of workers, and it may be able to work with offenders to improve resume-writing skills.

Next Steps

While these recommendations suggest a range of strategies that could be implemented independently by employers and public and private programs working to employ criminal offenders, a true Sector initiative requires strong partnerships between the stakeholders and commitment to the targeted population and industry. Five critical next steps must be taken in order to create a Sector initiative based on this research:

1. Select a target industry.
2. Identify a lead agency to spearhead the initiative.
3. Convene an Implementation Committee responsible for working with the lead agency to plan, design, develop resources for, implement, monitor and assess the initiative.
4. Prioritize which strategies to focus on during the first year of implementation.
5. Develop an outline of the program design and a projected budget.
6. Secure resources to support the implementation phase.

INTRODUCTION

Project Background and Applicability of Research Methodology

With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the San Francisco District Attorney's Office (SFDA) and the National Economic Development and Law Center (NEDLC) undertook this research project in order to help guide the development of industry-specific workforce development programs that can provide good wages and/or career advancement opportunities for criminal offenders. The research findings are intended to inform the SFDA's new Street to Work initiative, an employment-based alternative to incarceration for first-time, low-level drug dealers aged 18-30, in which successful program participants will have the felony conviction waived from their records. This research will also be helpful to training and service providers, employers, and funders interested in the rehabilitation of criminal offenders in San Francisco and the greater Bay Area. The research methodology is organized around identifying "sector", or industry-specific, strategies that focus on improving wages and career advancement for offenders. At the same time, these strategies aim to support the industries in which offenders are employed. The methodology developed for this report can also be used to inform programs assisting offenders in other areas of the country.

Rather than focusing on barriers to employment, Sector methodology identifies industries and key factors that allow offenders to access good jobs, and it describes strategies to improve their job retention, wage rates, working conditions and fringe benefits. One of the other objectives of this research is to determine whether these industries are "high quality" ones that provide good wages, fringe benefits, and opportunities for career advancement. Depending on the characteristics of the industry an employment program chooses to target, the implementation of projects stemming from this research might focus on improving the industry's conditions (if it is "low quality") or on promoting offenders' access to the industry (if it is "high quality").

Sector research typically examines industries' demand for workers to narrow down the field of potential industries to target. This is done in order to identify industries that might be willing to change some of their hiring and employment practices in exchange for a project's help in recruiting and training qualified workers. However, offenders are unable to access jobs in many industries for legal reasons, in addition to facing employers' concerns about safety and security. Therefore, the research methodology used for this research project takes a new approach; it examines only the Bay Area sectors and industries that currently employ the highest concentrations of ex-felons. These industries are proven to be accessible to offenders. The research then studies other characteristics, including demand for workers, wages, and opportunities for career advancement, to determine what strategies will be needed to move offenders into available high-quality jobs in these accessible industries.

In addition to its implications for employment training programs targeting offenders, this research project has several potential policy implications. The findings may impact: (1) the criminal justice system by leading the courts to develop employment diversion policies for low-level offenders; (2) federal, state and local workforce development policies regarding how employment training programs for offenders should be *designed*; and (3) policies regarding how economic and workforce development *resources* can be utilized to support offenders who are employed or transitioning into the workplace.

Thus, while this project focuses on the San Francisco Bay Area, the ultimate audience for the research findings is diverse and national in scope, including members of the criminal justice field, civic leaders, private employers, workforce and economic development practitioners, philanthropic foundations, and advocates.



What Are Sector Employment Initiatives?

Definition

Through extensive quantitative and qualitative research, sector employment initiatives lead to the creation of innovative strategies, policies, programs and practices that are designed to accomplish two objectives. The first objective is to improve low-income individuals' access to well-paid jobs and opportunities for career advancement in a specific industry. The second, and equally important, objective is to strengthen the competitiveness of that industry. The strategies employed by sector initiatives share four common elements that distinguish them from traditional economic and workforce development programs.

1. They are targeted to a specific industry, and craft solutions tailored to that industry in a particular geographic region.
2. They are led by an organization with deep knowledge of the targeted industry. Through this knowledge, the organization is able to link members of the target population and local businesses with other organizations that may include community-based nonprofits, educational and training institutions, employer associations, organized labor and others.
3. They provide strategies, often focused on training, that benefit low-income individuals including the unemployed, non-traditional labor pools and incumbent low-wage workers. In the case of this research project, the target population is criminal offenders.
4. They promote industry change that cultivates a win-win environment by restructuring the target industry's employment and other practices to benefit employers, and the target population.

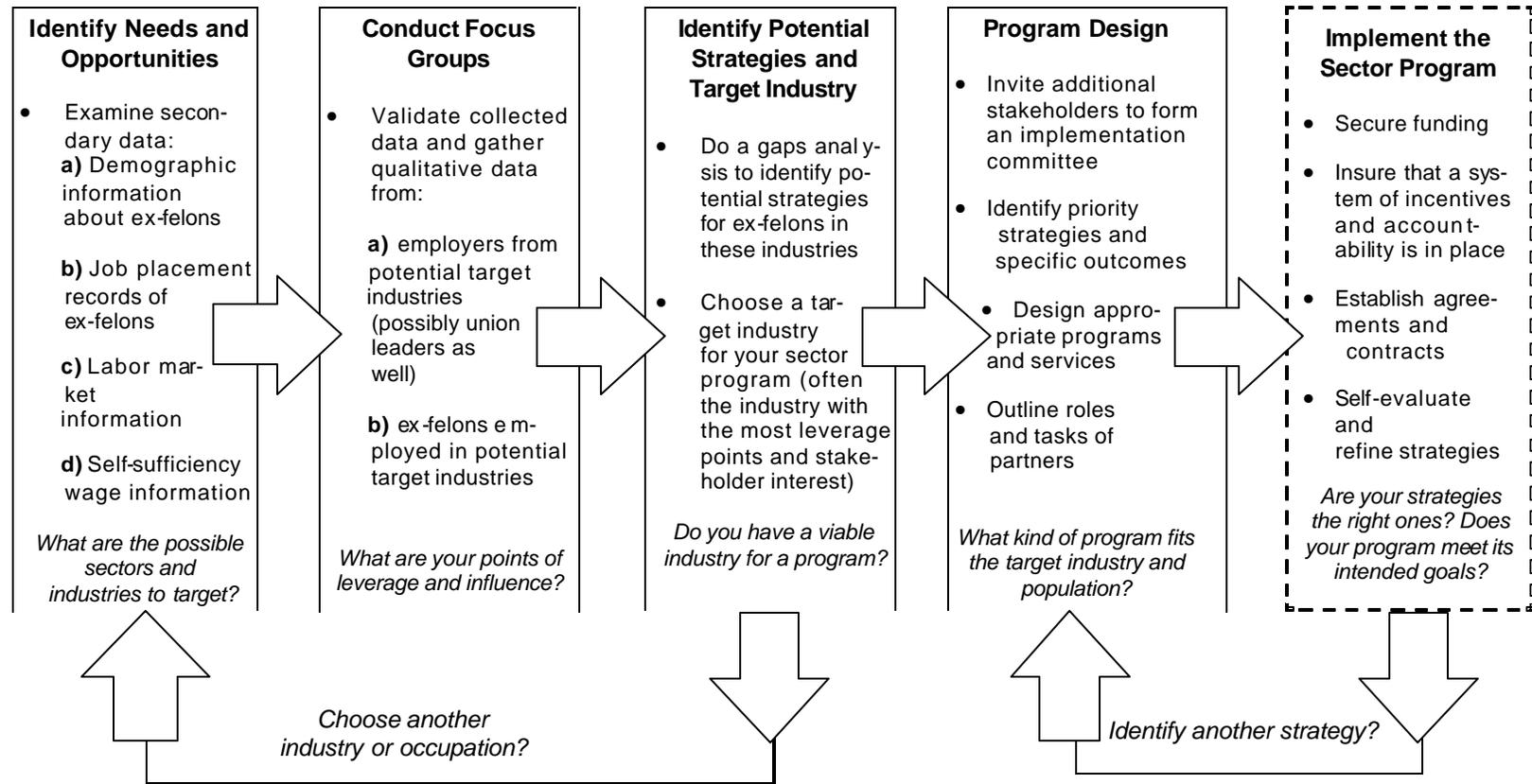
Sector Methodology

Because they are tailored to the needs of a specific community, no two sector employment initiatives are alike. The basic research and design process for this initiative is outlined in the flow chart on the following page. The research discussed in this report covers the first three of the five steps in this chart. Whether or not the project continues through the remaining steps depends on the interest and leadership of the San Francisco workforce development community.



Overview of Sector Initiative Research and Design for Employing Offenders in San Francisco

Identify stakeholders/partners and build relationships throughout these phases of development



Data Types and Sources

The primary objectives of the sector research process are to select an appropriate target industry to focus program efforts on, collect additional information about the target population that the sector initiative intends to benefit (in this case, offenders), and begin to engage interested stakeholders. For this project, although the research is intended to inform the SFDA's Street to Work diversion program working with people who have not yet been convicted, we did not have the ability to find data on this specific population's employment characteristics. It was concluded that studying the experiences of ex-felons would highlight similar issues to those that would be faced by participants in a program serving felony offenders. The two groups should face the same cultural and educational barriers, and potential employers invited to partner with other stakeholders on a targeted employment project will be aware of clients' criminal background regardless of clean records. Additionally, it is our hope that other readers of this report who work with ex-offenders not in diversion programs will find this research and the associated recommendations helpful.

The first phase of the research involves gathering several types of quantitative data from secondary sources:

- **Demographic data:** To ensure that the recommended strategies are appropriate to the target population of offenders, information was collected on variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, occupation and educational attainment. These data come from records of the San Francisco County Sheriff's Office and the Northern California Service League. In order to understand some of the target population's barriers in finding work, demographic information on ex-felons was compared to U.S. Census data on general residents of San Francisco County.
- **Data on accessibility to ex-felons:** The job placement records for the clients of the San Francisco Sheriff's Office and the Northern California Service League were used to identify which occupations and industries historically offered the best access to ex-felons.
- **Employment projections:** Within the identified accessible industries, the number of job opportunities was analyzed through a review of historical and current employment levels and projections of new job creation at the sector, industry and occupational levels. A dataset containing this information for San Francisco County (1999 - 2007) was purchased from the California Employment Development Department (EDD).
- **Data on education and training requirements:** Occupational entry requirements were used to gauge the accessibility of particular positions and industries to low-skill workers, since the majority of offenders have low educational attainment. Occupational entry requirements were also used as a proxy to assess the opportunities for career advancement within each identified industry. This data is also included in EDD's dataset for San Francisco County.
- **Wage data:** Entry-level and average occupational wage data for San Francisco County in 2001 was obtained from a California Employment Development Department survey.
- **Self-sufficiency data:** Self-sufficiency wage data, which determine the amount of wages that an individual or family needs to cover basic needs (food, shelter, healthcare, childcare, transportation, etc.) without public subsidy, were also collected. These data were obtained from Wider Opportunities for Women, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that developed the Self-Sufficiency Standard. The Self-Sufficiency Standard calculates this wage for households of a particular size and composition in a specific geographic region. We used their most recent calculations (year 2000) for San Francisco County.

For this research project, industries were identified based on which had the highest concentrations of ex-felons already working in them. This methodology was selected because the ability of ex-felons to access jobs in many industries is governed by strict laws, company policies, safety regulations or fear of legal suit, all of which could hinder attempts to move felons into an industry. The partners in this research decided that they would be in a better position to influence employers' growth, career ladders and wages than their willingness or ability to hire felons. Once industries accessible to ex-felons were identified, information on demand for workers, wage levels, accessibility by education level and potential for advancement was then used to enhance understanding of the potential target industries and the target population.

Two potential target industries – Social Services and Special Trade Construction – were identified on the basis of this initial, quantitative phase of research. Additional data were gathered through focus groups. The qualitative information from focus group findings was used to verify, refine, and add depth to the statistical data. Focus groups were held with:

- **Local employers** from the potential target industries (Social Services and Special Trade Construction), and
- **Local residents** who were ex-felons and between the ages of 18 and 65.

Report Layout

This report walks through the steps of the sector research process in the order that they occurred, presenting findings at each stage. First, demographic data is used to provide a more detailed description of the “Target Area and Target Population.” In the following section, an analysis of “Industry Information” results in the selection of two potential target industries. The section on “Focus Group Findings” presents the perspectives of ex-felons and San Francisco employers on workforce and employment issues within the potential target industries. Based on an analysis of the quantitative and qualitative findings, the final sections offer “Recommendations” and “Next Steps” for the future implementation of sector employment initiatives for criminal offenders in San Francisco.



TARGET AREA AND POPULATION

For the purposes of this sector research, the original target population was low-level, first-time drug offenders age 18-30 in San Francisco, California, since this is the profile of the SFDA's Street to Work initiative participants. Unfortunately, data on this group are difficult to obtain. Reasons for this difficulty include the absence of questions about criminal history in the U.S. Census, the Probation Office's use of paper records in preference to a significant database system, and the tendency of organizations working with ex-felons not to record specific information about their clients' offenses. We were eventually able to obtain data with the help of the San Francisco County Sheriff's Office and the Northern California Service League, in part by expanding our definition of the target population to include individuals with multiple and more serious offences and ages up to 40 years old. With these changes, we were able to obtain records including details of employment for 150 ex-felons and demographic records on 21 ex-felons that did not include employment details.

The profile below is based on the records of up to 171 ex-felons age 18 to 40 who chose to attend programs at the San Francisco County Sheriff's Office or the Northern California Service League. Despite possible biases due to the limited sources of data and the expanded criteria, the information below provides the closest portrait available of working-age ex-felons in the San Francisco area. Where appropriate, the sample of ex-felons is compared to the general population of San Francisco (where most of the ex-felons in the Street to Work initiative live and work), with whom they compete for jobs.

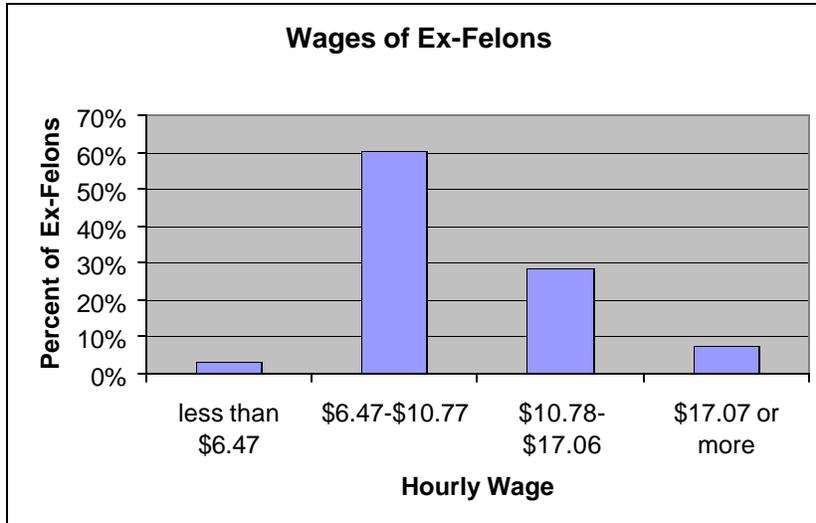
Demographic Profile of San Francisco Ex-Felons

Income and Poverty

According to Census 2000, an average working San Francisco County resident earned \$31,343 in 1999. Assuming a 40 hour-a-week, 52 week-a-year work schedule, San Francisco residents' wages averaged \$15.07 per hour. In contrast, our sample of ex-felons earned \$10.10 per hour on average, or \$21,003 annually for full-time work.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard³ estimates that the hourly wage per person required to support a two-adult, no-child household is \$6.47. An adult living alone needs \$10.78 per hour, and an adult supporting one school-age child needs \$17.07 per hour. Of the 71 ex-felons in our sample who reported wages, 64% did not earn enough to support themselves living alone, and only 8% (5 individuals) earned enough to support a school-age child.

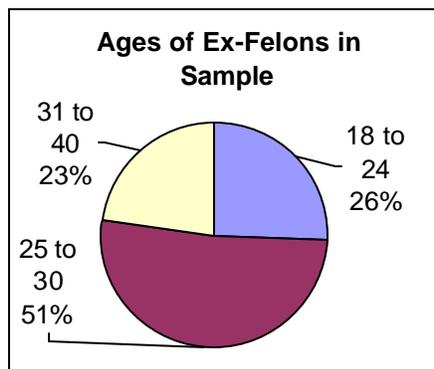
³ Source: Wider Opportunities for Women, California Self-Sufficiency Standard, San Francisco County, November 2000



Unfortunately, sample data about ex-felons' households (marital status, children, etc.) were not available, making it impossible to gage the actual numbers of ex-felons who were making self-sufficiency wages for this sample. In the two focus groups we held with ex-felons, which will be discussed in the next section, most participants either lived alone or with other adults. About half paid to support children living outside their households. Thus, the self-sufficiency wages for the household sizes described above most likely match the general ex-felon population.

Age and Gender

Of the ex-felons in our sample, most were in the 25 to 30 age range. 23% were older than the target population maximum of 30. These data as well as the information from focus groups (outlined in the next section) suggest that ex-felons who successfully participate in employment programs may typically be at the older end of the target age range of 18 to 30.



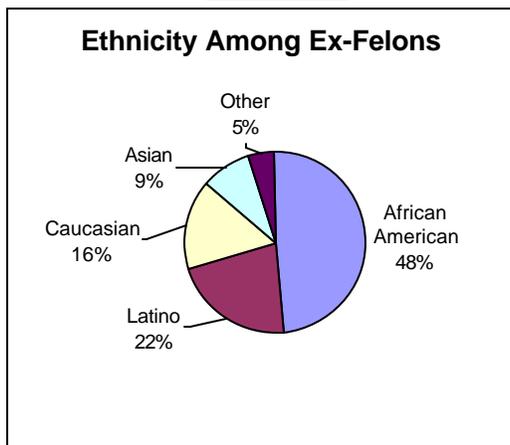
About 75% of our sample was male, and about 25% female. These numbers may actually overestimate the proportion of female ex-felons, as a contact at the Sheriff's Office explained that their program tends to draw women. According to San Francisco County data available from the California Department of Justice, only 18% of people arrested for felonies in 2001 were female⁴.

⁴ "2001 Criminal Justice Profiles." Criminal Justice Statistics Center, Attorney General's Office, State of California Department of Justice. http://justice.hdcdojnet.state.ca.us/cjsc_stats/prof01/38/3B.htm. The percentage of females among people arrested for felonies has remained approximately constant since 1998, before which it was much lower.

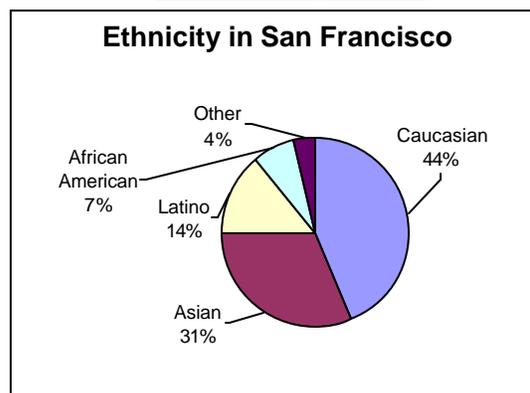
Race/Ethnicity

Most of the ex-felons in our sample were African-American. They were followed by Latinos, Caucasians, and Asians. The chart of ethnicity among San Francisco County residents overall, shown on the following page, highlights the dramatic over-representation of African-Americans and under-representation of Caucasians and Asians among ex-felons. In this case, our sample probably provides a good approximation to the general population of ex-felons.

Ex-Felons

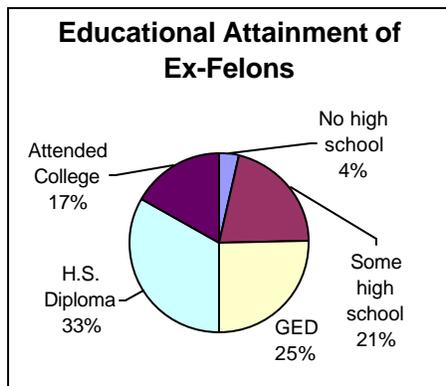


General Population

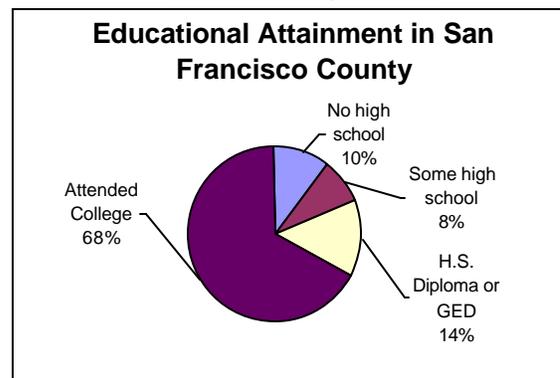


Source: Census 2000

Ex-Felons



General Population



Data represents residents over 25 years old. Source: Census 2000

Our sample data did not specify levels of college attainment. However, the chart above suggests that most ex-felons who have completed an employment program may still have no more than a high school diploma or GED.

The ex-felons in our sample were more likely than other San Francisco residents to have attended high school. At all other levels, ex-felons are far less educated than San Francisco County residents in general.

Summary: Key Characteristics of the Target Population

- There is a lack of accurate data about ex-felons.
- At least 64% of ex-felons in sample data did not earn enough to afford living alone, and only 8% earned enough to support a school-age child. On average, ex-felons' wages were well below those of other San Francisco County residents.
- The ex-felon population is about 48% African-American, with the next-largest groups being Latinos (22%) and non-Latin whites (16%).
- 25% of the ex-felons in our sample did not have a high school diploma or GED and 83% had never attended college. In contrast, only 32% of San Francisco County residents have never attended college.



INDUSTRY INFORMATION

Purpose of Industry Research

In Sector research, an industry's demand for workers, accessibility to the target population, wage levels, and career ladders are used as measures of the promise of the industry for a sector employment program. Sector programs aim to enable the target population to secure employment in high-quality industries by working with employers and training providers to address challenges within a selected industry. Target Industries are typically selected based on how they compare using the criteria listed above

In the case of this project, the ability of felons to access jobs in an industry was deemed more important than all the other criteria. In many industries, ex-felons cannot access most jobs due to legal barriers (as with healthcare), company policies, or hiring managers' biases or fear of litigation. The partners in this project agreed that wages, career ladders, and even the demand for workers could be improved more easily than felons' access to an industry. For these reasons, accessibility was the criterion used almost exclusively to select the two potential target industries to be studied further in focus groups. The first part of this section shows how this selection was made using employment data on the sample of 171 San Francisco ex-felons discussed in the previous section. Because ex-felons were already working in these industries, they are known to already have access to them.

Labor market information provides a snapshot of the overall structure of a regional economy, and can be useful for identifying broad trends that will affect local employment patterns and workforce development needs. Therefore, a thorough examination of data on the potential target industries is an important aspect of this research. The description of the selection of the two potential target industries is followed by a detailed analysis of wages, career ladders, and demand for workers in these industries.

Introduction to Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) Codes

This section refers to the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) national coding system. As defined by the SIC system, there are nine broad sectors of the economy: Agriculture, Construction/Mining, Manufacturing, Wholesale Trade, Retail Trade, Financial/Insurance/Real Estate (FIRE), Transportation/Communication/Utilities (TCU), Services, and Government. At the next level of detail, a two-digit SIC code refers to sub-sectors of the economy, or industries, such as Special Trade Construction, Social Services, or Health Services.

Identifying Potential Target Industries

Criteria

As explained in the methodology section of this report and the introduction to this section, the primary criterion used to narrow the field of potential target industries was accessibility to ex-felons. For this research, industry accessibility was measured by the proportion of ex-felons holding jobs in that industry. The sample consisted of 171⁵ ex-felons age 18 to 40 who were engaged in programs at the San Francisco County Sheriff's Office or the Northern California Service League; 150 of the records gathered included usable employment information.

⁵ 21 employment records could not be classified by industry due to unrecognizable or absent employer names. These records were not included in the analysis of accessibility.



Overview

We first categorized ex-felons' employers by SIC code. For example, "Noah's Bagels" is categorized under the Retail Trade sector and the Eating and Drinking Places industry. Then, the four sectors employing the highest numbers of ex-felons were chosen. These sectors were Services, Retail Trade, Construction, and Transportation, Communication and Utilities. Out of these, only the Social Services, Eating and Drinking Places, and Special Trade Construction industries included more than 6% of the sample. Social Services and Special Trade Construction were selected for continuing research in the form of labor market analysis and focus groups.

Sector	Industry	Accessibility: Percent of Sample Employed (sample size: 150)	Final Selection
Services	Social Services	10.00%	Yes
	Business Services	5.33%	No
	Membership Organizations ⁶	4.67%	No
Retail Trade	Eating and Drinking Places	9.33%	No
	Furniture and Home Furnishings Stores	4.67%	No
	Food Stores	4.67%	No
Construction	Special Trade Construction	7.33%	Yes
	Building Construction	3.33%	No
Transportation, Communication, Utilities	Motor Freight Transportation and Warehousing	3.33%	No
	Communication	2.67%	No

The specific steps of the analysis and the decisions made at each step are outlined in detail in the rest of this section.

Step 1: Selecting Sectors

Process

The nine sectors of the economy were ranked in order of their representation in the sample of ex-felons, and the top four were chosen as consistently accessible.

Decision Step and Outcome

The sectors were ranked as follows on the following page's chart:

⁶ Membership organizations include museums, churches, unions, and other organizations in which employees work to serve members. In Special Trade Construction, union members may sometimes report themselves to be working for the union, when they actually work in the construction industry. 5 of the "Membership Organizations" cited are unions for construction workers.

Number and Percent of Ex-Felon Sample Employed by Sector		
Sector	Number	Percent
Services	62	41.33%
Retail Trade	45	30.00%
Construction	17	11.33%
Transportation, Communication, Utilities	11	7.33%
Wholesale Trade	5	3.33%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	4	2.67%
Government	4	2.67%
Durable Manufacturing	1	0.67%
Non-Durable Manufacturing	1	0.67%
Total	150	100.00%

Services, Retail Trade, Construction, and Transportation, Communication, Utilities were clearly accessible to ex-felons. The other five sectors were dropped from analysis at this point due to the low numbers of ex-felons employed in them.

Step 2: Selecting Industries

Process

The four sectors selected in the previous step included 46 different industries. Within each sector, the industries were compared by the number of sampled ex-felons they employed. The two most promising industries were selected for further analysis.

Decision Step and Outcome

The top industries in each sector were ranked according to their apparent accessibility to ex-felons.

Social Services, Eating and Drinking Places, and Special Trade Construction each employed more than 7% (10) of the sampled ex-felons, which suggests reasonably easy accessibility to the target population.

Top 4 Sectors: Number and Percent of Ex-Felon Sample Employed by Industry				
Sector	Industry	Number	Percent of Sector	Percent of Sample
Services	Social Services	15	24.19%	10.00%
	Business Services	8	12.90%	5.33%

Top 4 Sectors: Number and Percent of Ex-Felon Sample Employed by Industry				
Sector	Industry	Number	Percent of Sector	Percent of Sample
	Membership Organizations	7	11.29%	4.67%
Retail Trade	Eating and Drinking Places	14	31.11%	9.33%
	Furniture and Home Furnishings Stores	7	15.56%	4.67%
	Food Stores	7	15.56%	4.67%
Construction	Special Trade Construction	11	64.71%	7.33%
	Building Construction	5	29.41%	3.33%
Transportation, Communication, Utilities	Motor Freight Transportation and Warehousing	5	45.45%	3.33%
	Communication	4	36.36%	2.67%

This research project had the resources to hold focus groups with only two industries. As Eating and Drinking Places as an industry is known to have chronically low wages and limited career ladders, Social Services and Special Trade Construction were selected as the best potential target industries.

Understanding the Potential Target Industries

Occupations and Job Openings

Data Sources

In addition to the sample data on ex-felons, this step used the Economic Development Department's San Francisco County occupational employment projections dataset for 1999-2006 to assess growth and turnover – which reflect demand for workers – in the two industries.

Results

The sampled ex-felons employed in Special Trade Construction held positions as Carpenters, Roofers, Construction Helpers, Truckdrivers, Plumbers, Pipefitters and Steamfitters, Painters, Construction and Maintenance Workers, and Cement Masons and Concrete Finishers. These trades correspond fairly well to the most in-demand trades in Special Trade Construction, which are listed in the chart on the following page.

Special Trade Construction: 1999-2006 Projections				
Occupation	1999 Employment	Growth	Expected Attrition	Average Annual Openings
PAINTERS, PAPERHANGERS	1085	10.78%	206	46.1
ELECTRICIANS	1222	10.31%	183	44.1
ROOFERS	429	7.23%	105	19.4
TELEPHONE, CABLE TV INSTALLERS	276	20.29%	68	17.7
SHEET METAL WORKERS	270	22.22%	54	16.3
HELPERS --PAINTERS AND RELATED	206	11.17%	75	14.0
GENERAL OFFICE CLERKS	261	10.34%	51	11.1
CARPENTERS	234	13.68%	45	11.0
PLUMBERS, PIPEFITTERS, STEAMFITTER	449	7.57%	41	10.7
FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS	206	12.14%	42	9.6

Source: EDD's 1999-2006 job projections for San Francisco County

In Social Services, the sampled ex-felons held positions as Counselors, Social and Human Service Assistants, Child Care Workers, Light Truck Drivers, Stock Clerks and Order Fillers, Self-Enrichment Education Teachers, Receptionists and Information Clerks, Painters, Construction Helpers, and Customer Service Representatives. This list is somewhat different from the list of the most in-demand occupations (as shown in the chart below), although Counselor and Child Care Worker showed up in both lists. Some of the high-demand occupations, such as General Managers, Top Executives and Social Workers, Medical or Psychiatric, may require education or experience levels higher than most felons have achieved. Others, such as Preschool Teachers, Personal and Home Care Aides, and Child Care Workers, may not legally be able to be filled by ex-offenders. However, several of the occupations with highest demand for workers, including Human Services Worker, Residential Counselor, Social Worker, and General Office Clerk do appear to be accessible.

Social Services: 1999-2006 Projections				
Occupation	1999 Employment	Growth	Expected Attrition	Average Annual Openings



Social Services: 1999-2006 Projections				
Occupation	1999 Employment	Growth	Expected Attrition	Average Annual Openings
HUMAN SERVICES WORKERS	1008	31.25%	214	75.6
PRESCHOOL TEACHERS	1172	6.23%	180	36.1
PERSONAL AND HOME CARE AIDES	528	10.61%	106	23.1
RESIDENTIAL COUNSELORS	581	6.88%	95	19.3
GENERAL MANAGERS, TOP EXECUTIVES	823	3.77%	102	19.0
SOCIAL WORKERS, EXCEPT MEDICAL OR PSYCHIATRIC	924	4.76%	83	18.1
CHILD CARE WORKERS	757	7.53%	56	16.1
GENERAL OFFICE CLERKS	416	6.49%	82	15.6
FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS, ADMINISTRATIVE	371	3.77%	59	10.4
SOCIAL WORKERS, MEDICAL OR PSYCHIATRIC	526	3.99%	48	9.9

Source: EDD's 1999-2006 job projections for San Francisco County

Conclusion

Both industries have a variety of high-demand occupations. In Construction, Painters and Paperhangers and Electricians have the most projected openings. In Social Services, Human Service Workers and Preschool Teachers have the highest numbers of projected openings, although offenders may have to submit to a lengthy application process to be legally permitted to work as Preschool Teachers.

Wages

Data Sources

This step used the EDD's San Francisco County occupational employment projections dataset for 1999-2006 in conjunction with the EDD analysis of 2001 wages in San Francisco County.

Wages are compared to the amount required to be self-sufficient in San Francisco. This wage amount was determined by using the Wider Opportunities for Women's Self-Sufficiency Standard,⁷ calculated specifically for San Francisco County by a statewide project called Californians for Family Economic Self-Sufficiency (CFESS).⁸ The Self-Sufficiency Standard estimates that the hourly wage per person required to support a 2-adult, no-child household is \$6.47. An adult living alone needs \$10.78 per hour, and an adult supporting one school-age child needs \$17.07 per hour. These requirements vary according to the ages of the children and the corresponding childcare, health, transportation, and housing costs.

Process and Outcome

The chart on the following page looks at entry-level wages in the most-in-demand occupations in Special Trade Construction.

Special Trade Construction: 2001 Wages, San Francisco County		
Occupation	Average Entry-Level Wage	Average Overall Wage
PAINTERS, PAPERHANGERS	\$14.48	\$19.85
ELECTRICIANS	\$17.24	\$27.79
ROOFERS	\$11.64	\$20.10
TELEPHONE, CABLE TV INSTALLERS	\$13.70	\$20.09
SHEET METAL WORKERS	\$16.68	\$26.69
HELPERS --PAINTERS AND RELATED	\$6.85	\$12.80
GENERAL OFFICE CLERKS	\$9.48	\$14.00
CARPENTERS	\$16.95	\$26.25
PLUMBERS, PIPEFITTERS, STEAMFITTERS	\$16.57	\$27.45
FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS	\$20.52	\$29.24

Source: California Employment Development Department

Most of these occupations would support an adult living alone, even at entry-level, assuming consistent work. Only two jobs would support an adult with a child at entry-level, but almost all of occupations listed would eventually lead to a wage high enough to support a child.

The table below looks at wages in the Social Services industry.

Social Services: 2001 Wages, San Francisco County		
Occupation	Average Entry-Level Wage	Average Overall Wage
HUMAN SERVICES WORKERS	\$11.50	\$15.15
PRESCHOOL TEACHERS	\$9.09	\$13.06

⁷ Pearce, Diana and Jennifer Brooks, "The Self-Sufficiency Standard for California." Wider Opportunities for Women. November 2000. For more information, visit www.wowonline.org.

⁸ Managed by the National Economic Development and Law Center.

PERSONAL AND HOME CARE AIDES	\$6.56	\$8.14
RESIDENTIAL COUNSELORS	\$6.91	\$9.99
GENERAL MANAGERS, TOP EXECUTIVES	\$33.12	Unknown
SOCIAL WORKERS, EXCEPT MEDICAL OR PSYCHIATRIC	\$11.41	\$19.52
CHILD CARE WORKERS	\$8.71	\$14.19
GENERAL OFFICE CLERKS	\$9.48	\$14.00
FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS, ADMINISTRATIVE	\$16.03	\$23.94
SOCIAL WORKERS, MEDICAL OR PSYCHIATRIC	\$12.25	\$17.65

Source: California Employment Development Department

Half of these occupations would support an adult living alone at entry-level. Most could eventually lead to wages high enough to support a single adult. An adult with a child could probably become self-sufficient in four of the ten listed occupations.

Conclusion

Special Trade Construction generally offers much higher wages than the Social Services industry. Both have self-sufficiency level wages in some high-demand occupations, particularly for adults without children.

Educational Requirements

Data Sources

This step used the EDD's San Francisco County occupational employment projections dataset for 1999-2006 (which included Bureau of Labor Statistics assessments of educational requirements) to identify educational requirements of the industries' high-demand occupations.

Process and Outcome

The table below shows high-demand Special Trade Construction occupations with typical educational requirements as measured by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Special Trade Construction: Educational Requirements	
Occupation	Education Requirements
PAINTERS, PAPERHANGERS	MODERATE-TERM ON-THE-JOB TRAINING
ELECTRICIANS	LONG-TERM ON-THE-JOB TRAINING
ROOFERS	MODERATE-TERM ON-THE-JOB TRAINING
TELEPHONE, CABLE TV INSTALLERS	LONG-TERM ON-THE-JOB TRAINING
SHEET METAL WORKERS	MODERATE-TERM ON-THE-JOB TRAINING
HELPERS --PAINTERS AND RELATED	SHORT-TERM ON-THE-JOB TRAINING
GENERAL OFFICE CLERKS	SHORT-TERM ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

CARPENTERS	LONG-TERM ON-THE-JOB TRAINING
PLUMBERS, PIPEFITTERS, STEAMFITTERS	LONG-TERM ON-THE-JOB TRAINING
FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS	WORK EXPERIENCE

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Most Construction trades are learned through on-the-job training, with no degree requirement.

The table below shows high-demand Social Services occupations with typical educational requirements as measured by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Social Service: Educational Requirements	
Occupation	Education Requirements
HUMAN SERVICES WORKERS	MODERATE-TERM ON-THE-JOB TRAINING
PRESCHOOL TEACHERS	BACHELOR'S DEGREE
PERSONAL AND HOME CARE AIDES	SHORT-TERM ON-THE-JOB TRAINING
RESIDENTIAL COUNSELORS	BACHELOR'S DEGREE
GENERAL MANAGERS, TOP EXECUTIVES	WORK EXP., PLUS A BACHELOR'S OR HIGHER
SOCIAL WORKERS, EXCEPT MEDICAL OR PSYCHIATRIC	BACHELOR'S DEGREE
CHILD CARE WORKERS	SHORT-TERM ON-THE-JOB TRAINING
GENERAL OFFICE CLERKS	SHORT-TERM ON-THE-JOB TRAINING
FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS, ADMINISTRATIVE	WORK EXPERIENCE
SOCIAL WORKERS, MEDICAL OR PSYCHIATRIC	MASTER'S DEGREE

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Most of the high-demand Social Services occupations are either learned through short-term on-the-job training or require a Bachelor's degree.

Conclusion

Many high-demand occupations in each industry require on-the-job training, rather than a college degree. Construction is particularly open to people without degrees, which is relevant for a program targeting criminal offenders given that 83% of our sample had never attended college at all.

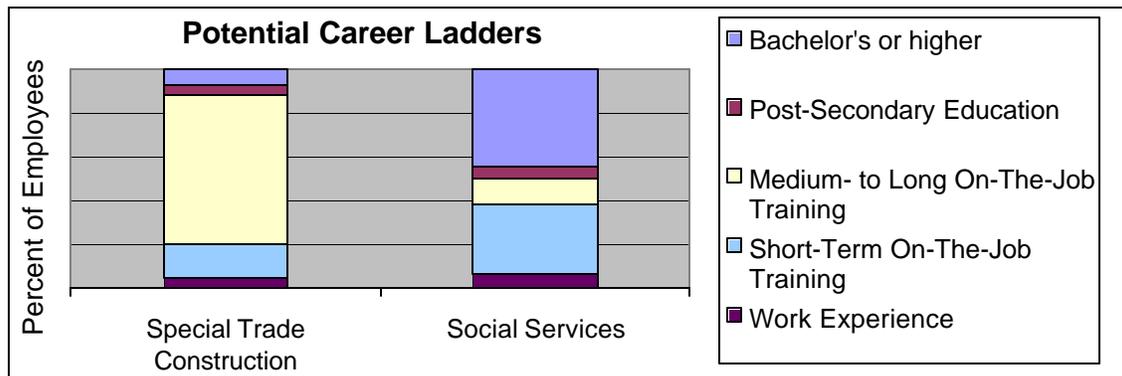
Potential Career Ladders

Data Sources

The same employment and training requirement information from the 1999-2006 EDD dataset that was used in earlier steps was used again to examine career ladders, or opportunity for career advancement.



Process and Outcome



The chart above shows the distribution of projected openings requiring different levels of experience and training within each industry. In Special Trade Construction, most jobs require medium- to long-term on-the-job training. If an employee is able to access the few jobs requiring only short-term training, he or she has many options for moving up. In Social Services, an employee in a job requiring short-term training may have a more difficult time moving up without going back to school for a Bachelor's degree.

Potential Target Industries for Focus Group Research

More information on both Special Trade Construction and Social Services was collected through focus groups with employers and ex-felons employed in these industries. This information, which includes more detail on demand for specific occupations, wages, career ladders, and ex-felons' experience and interest in the industries, is outlined in the next section.

Summary of Key Findings from Industry Information

- Current accessibility to ex-felons was the primary criterion used to select the potential target industries: Special Trade Construction and Social Services.
- Both industries appear to have high-demand occupations paying self-sufficiency wages, occupations with reasonably low training requirements, and good potential career ladders.
- Special Trade Construction generally pays higher wages and offers better career ladders than Social Services. While Social Services has more opportunities requiring only short-term training, in order to move up, a Bachelor's degree is necessary.

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Ex-Felon Focus Groups

Purpose and Participants

These focus groups were designed to gather information directly from the target population of ex-felons about a variety of work and training-related issues, including: What has been their experience in the potential target industries? What occupations are most and least appealing to them, and why? What barriers do they face in obtaining and keeping jobs or in attending training? How do they find employment and training opportunities?

In January and February of 2003, two focus groups were held with a total of 20 ex-felons from the San Francisco area. The first was with former or current Social Services workers, and the second with ex-felons in the Special Trade Construction industry. Characteristics of the focus group participants are summarized below:

- **Gender:** 35% female and 65% male. All but one of the women were in the Social Services focus group. According to San Francisco County data available from the California Department of Justice, only 18% of people arrested for felonies in 2001 were female⁹. The

⁹ "2001 Criminal Justice Profiles." Criminal Justice Statistics Center, Attorney General's Office, State of California Department of Justice. http://justice.hdcdojnet.state.ca.us/cjsc_stats/prof01/38/3B.htm. The percentage of females among people arrested for felonies has remained approximately constant since 1998, before which it was much lower.

high concentration of women in these focus groups may have been due to the Social Services industry's traditional predominance of female workers.

- **Ethnicity and Language:** Participants were 55% African American and 25% Latino, with the remaining participants being non-Latin Caucasian or Native American. These numbers match closely with ethnicity among the sample of ex-felons obtained from the Sheriff's Office and Northern California Service League. English was the primary language for 90%, with the two remaining participants speaking Spanish as their primary language.
- **Age:** 75% of participants were in the targeted 20-40 age range. Only one participant was over 50. Of those in the target age range, most were 35-40, while five were under 30 and only one was under 25. The older demographic of the focus groups in comparison to the sample of ex-felons discussed in the Target Population section may be because older ex-felons are more likely to have steady employment.
- **Household composition:** 40% of participants lived alone. 25% lived with one other adult, and 20% lived with two or more adults but no children. 30% paid support for children living outside of their households. Of the three participants who lived with their children, only one lived without other adults.
- **Employment status:** The majority (65%) of participants were employed. Of those who were not employed, most were in the Construction focus group (many of whom may have been affected by the industry's seasonal downturn).
- **Educational background:** 90% of participants had a high school diploma or equivalent. All had at least attended some high school. 45% had some college education, but only two had degrees. The Special Trade Construction focus group had fewer participants with college backgrounds, probably because the Trades use union apprenticeship training to move people up while college education is more necessary for advancement in Social Services. The relatively high educational levels (compared to the sample of ex-felons examined in the Target Population section) may highlight an important difference between ex-felons who are able to find careers in promising industries and the ex-felon population in general.
- **Criminal history:** 60% of participants had only one or two felony convictions. Others had received anywhere from three to simply "many" convictions. 70% had been convicted of drug-related offenses. While several had requested that their records be expunged, only two had succeeded with this process.

Industry Background

Social Services

The participants held a variety of positions, most of which involved providing direct services to San Francisco residents who were low-income or had substance-abuse issues. Most earned \$10 to \$11 per hour. They generally worked full-time, although several had flexible schedules, and almost all received at least basic benefits.

Special Trade Construction

Participants worked in a cross section of the Trades, with most being ironworkers or laborers. Most earned \$20 to \$25 per hour. They worked full-time when they had jobs, but the availability of work

varied by season (notably, most were unemployed at the time of the focus group). Those who had accrued enough union hours (usually 450 to 700) received basic benefits, and they could receive more benefits as they continued working.

Career Interest and Perceptions

Social Services

Only four of the 11 participants in the Social Services group said they planned to remain in the industry. They liked Social Services because they enjoyed helping others and because their organizations supported them in getting further education. They disliked the low pay and emotionally draining nature of the work. Some also said they were frustrated by the lack of funding for their programs.

Most said that, should they remain in the industry, they would be able to advance as long as they continued to get more education. Participants described a variety of career options, most of which involved remaining with organizations similar to the ones in which they already worked. They said training and experience were required to be able to move up, and also highlighted the importance of making connections/networking to do so.

Special Trade Construction

All of the participants would like to stay in the Special Trade Construction industry. Participants liked being outside, doing physical labor, and receiving high wages. They also said they related well with co-workers and felt trusted by their supervisors. Participants didn't like the instability of seasonal work, and the Laborers said that benefits had recently decreased. They also didn't like the difficulty in getting job assignments from the unions.

The participants all expected to be able to advance through the union apprenticeship programs if they could get enough hours. Some had already advanced. In addition to formal training, they described mentoring relationships with more experienced workers as vital to learning new skills.



Employment-Related Challenges

Both focus groups listed markedly similar challenges to finding and maintaining employment. Combining the data, the most frequently mentioned challenges to becoming employed were:

- **Meeting Parole Requirements:** This was mentioned as a problem in both focus groups. Participants described difficulty scheduling drug testing and other appointments required by their court obligations around work and class schedules. One Drug Court graduate had lost a high-paying job in Construction because his drug testing could not be scheduled around times when he was required to be at work. Several people in the Social Services focus group had been forced to miss training in order to meet with parole or probation officers.
- **Transportation Issues:** Both groups mentioned transportation as a serious problem. Participants in the Social Services group said that public transportation was readily available, but often dangerous for people working late hours. Several Special Trade Construction group participants had not been able to accept jobs because they lacked access to transportation that could get them to the job sites.
- **Substance Abuse:** Participants in both groups said that recidivism is high due to substance abuse, particularly among recently released ex-felons. Particularly in the Social Services group, where more of the participants had drug-related felonies on their records, many said they had lost or been unable to find jobs after leaving prison because of continuing addiction issues.
- **Lack of Support Services:** Also in both groups, participants had difficulties in the first weeks and months after coming out of jail due to a lack of money for rent and tools or other work-related equipment.

Several potential challenges were expressed by participants as less important than might be expected. These included:

- **Criminal Background:** In the Social Services group, participants had been refused jobs because of their criminal backgrounds, but mostly in industries other than Social Services. In the Social Services industry, they said that once they had been out of prison for a while, their histories were seen as useful experience rather than as risk factors. Construction group participants had generally only looked for work in that industry, and had also not found their histories to cause problems. The exceptions in both industries were where laws stipulated that workers on a particular contract must not have committed felonies. Examples included certain government contracts in the Construction industry and licensed child care in the Social Services industry.
- **Child Care:** While finding care for children or disabled family members was mentioned in the Construction focus group, it was not mentioned as a problem for most participants. Their children generally lived in other households.
- **Gender and Other Discrimination:** Participants in the Construction focus group talked briefly about racial discrimination, but believed that difficulties in finding work stemmed more from not having the right connections. The one woman in the Construction focus group said she did not generally suffer from sexism at work. This industry is apparently working hard to address all forms of discrimination. Participants in the Social Services group did not mention problems with discrimination.

Training: Interests and Perceptions

Most participants in each group had taken training relating to their industry. Both groups showed an interest in further training, but only if it would lead to a better job or higher pay. For Construction group participants, the guarantee of a better job was their main requirement. Social Service group participants wanted training to be hands-on and taught by people experienced in the field. The Social Service group discussed liking the sense of accomplishment resulting from training.

Participants in the Special Trade Construction focus group were paid or subsidized for union-related training, and would definitely not be willing to pay for training themselves. They said parole/probation requirements, needing to be on call for a temporary employment agency, and lack of transportation could be other reasons not to attend training. Social Service group participants said \$50 to \$80 per month was a reasonable cost, but several said they simply didn't have the money to pay for training. Their other barriers included not getting paid for the hours invested and scheduling. Social Service participants were particularly concerned about using up weekend and evening hours, and several said a full day of training would be too long to concentrate.

Most participants in both groups said they would attend training as long as was necessary to move into a better job. All were willing to attend training outside of their neighborhoods. Both groups preferred weekday classes, although some Social Services participants would want to schedule their training around work.

Social Service participants had learned about previous training through City and County resources, word of mouth, referrals from recovery programs, and directly from colleges. Construction participants learned about training through apprenticeship programs, word of mouth, and recovery programs.

Job Search Process

Social Services group participants reported long periods of frequent unemployment after their convictions. Reasons included continuing addiction problems and employers' wish to see that they could stay out of prison for a while before offering jobs. Once they had completed training and "life skills" programs, participants had typically found jobs within six months. Construction group participants, on the other hand, had been able to enter unions immediately after leaving prison (some had been members before their convictions). They found jobs within one to four months of their release, depending on their access to transportation, tools, and other necessities, as well as on the seasonal workflow. While unemployed, participants relied on temporary jobs and support from family, friends, shelters and treatment centers. Construction group participants who were already union members had received some additional support from the unions. Participants in both groups were concerned that younger ex-felons would be less likely than themselves to continue a protracted job search, due to a shift towards a "faster-moving culture" and the quantity of money now available for selling drugs. Participants in the Construction focus group said that mentors who had overcome similar barriers would help encourage recent felons to continue the job search and steer away from a criminal lifestyle.

Finding Jobs

Special Trade Construction

Participants found jobs through newspapers and by showing up at job sites in preference to the union halls. Although these methods are against the rules of some unions, there is a loophole for

members being re-hired by a former employer. Additionally, some non-profit organizations, such as Mission Hiring Hall, are able to negotiate with the unions to place a particular member in an opening.

Social Services

Participants found jobs in Social Services primarily through personal networks and the assistance of transitional housing or substance abuse recovery programs. They also used online postings, but found that personal networks were necessary in most cases.

Summary: Key Findings from Ex-Felon Focus Groups

- In Social Services, ex-felons generally like their jobs, but find the pay too low and the work stressful. They earn approximately half what Construction workers earn. Most would prefer to find jobs in other industries, but they were concerned that their records would preclude them from these opportunities.
- Most of the ex-felons in Special Trade Construction plan to stay in the industry. They like their jobs and their wages, with the main downsides being the industry's seasonal changes in demand for workers and the difficulty in getting enough union job assignments.
- Ex-felons find that their criminal records do not generally cause problems in either industry. However, in Social Services ex-felons must remain "clean" for a while before they can access many jobs.
- Primary challenges to finding and maintaining employment include meeting parole/probation requirements, transportation, dealing with substance abuse issues, and lack of support services. Childcare and discrimination do not present challenges to most ex-felons in these industries.
- Both industries provide good benefits and access to training. Participants see potential for advancement, particularly with the help of mentors in the industry.
- Participants in the Construction group had access to subsidized training through unions and were interested in participating in order to advance. Social Services participants would be interested in affordable training with a hands-on focus, if it would lead to a better job.
- Participants in the Social Services industry looked for up to six months after life skills training/rehabilitation to find jobs. In the Trades, the search was more likely to last one to four months after leaving prison.
- In both industries, personal networks were the preferred way to find employment, followed by unions and community-based organizations in the Construction industry and classifieds/job listings in the Social Services industry.

Employer Focus Groups

Purpose and Participants

The purpose of the employer focus groups was to have local employers from the two industries verify – and if necessary, correct – the secondary labor market information (from EDD and the Bureau of Labor Statistics) that was collected about what occupations are in demand and what the skill requirements and entry-level wages are for those occupations. Other important functions of the focus groups were a) to understand the process by which local employers recruit, screen, and select job

applicants, b) to develop a picture of the work environment within each potential target industry; and c) to learn about the challenges that companies face in meeting their workforce needs. One employer focus group in Social Services and one in Special Trade Construction comprise this portion of the research. (See the Appendices for focus group protocols.)

The Social Services group was attended by 15 representatives from nine public and non-profit Social Service providers in San Francisco. The organizations varied in size from those employing 20 or 30 people to one employing over 1000. They provided job training and placement services, youth programs, low-income housing, and a wide range of supportive services. The Special Trade Construction focus group included five representatives from three large construction firms and a union.



SOCIAL SERVICES

Occupations Accessible to Ex-Felons and In-Demand

Focus group participants created a long list of jobs accessible to ex-felons, concluding that ex-felons would only be excluded from positions for which their felony made them particularly “risky”. Examples included placing a sex-felon in a job with children or a theft-felon in accounting. Additionally, some jobs (such as licensed childcare) legally may not be filled by an ex-felon unless the offender passes a lengthy application for permission to work in these positions. This is an important note given that three of the top 10 most in-demand occupations listed in the Industry Information section were preschool teachers, personal and home care aides, and child care workers, all of which may legally be difficult for ex-offenders to access.

None of the organizations had a general policy against hiring ex-felons. All said they would be willing to hire ex-felons (and had in the past), on a case-by-case basis. Their concerns about hiring ex-felons mostly related to fear of continued substance abuse.

The organizations found Truck Driving and Construction positions hardest to fill¹⁰. During the economic boom of 1999-2001, Case Managers were hard to find, but that has changed since the boom ended. They have turnover in many different positions due to “burnout”, evening schedules, low pay and San Francisco’s high cost of living, substance abuse relapse, and employees returning to school.

Wages and Benefits

Entry-level positions pay \$8-\$15 per hour depending on the organization and the job. All organizations provide some level of benefits for most positions. Employees may be eligible for benefits after 30 days, 90 days, or 6 months, depending on the organization. Many positions may be part-time or on-call, depending on the needs of the organization. None of the organizations utilizes government incentive programs for hiring ex-offenders, both because they are not aware of opportunities and because non-profit organizations are unable to access some benefits.

Outreach and Recruitment Practices

These employers recruit through Internet sites such as Craig’s List and Opportunity NOCS, newspaper classifieds, First Source hiring, and job training and other programs. They said many employees lived in Contra Costa and Alameda counties because of the high cost of living in San Francisco.

Screening and Hiring Practices

The application and interview process takes about one to two months in most organizations, although it can take longer depending on the hiring manager’s priorities. All the organizations lose applicants due to the length of the process, which for at least one organization is a way of screening out less dedicated applicants. The screening process includes a criminal background check at the larger organizations and for certain positions (such as working with youth) in the others. The housing providers/developers do not ask about criminal background. All other organizations ask about criminal history but are willing to hire ex-felons.

¹⁰ Truck Drivers and Construction and Maintenance workers do not always work in the Construction industry. For example, Social Services employers have positions for delivering thrift-store merchandise and maintaining low-income housing.

The organizations described experience with their client population and reliability/showing up as the most vital skills. Work experience is considered much more important than education. The most common reasons for eliminating an applicant include substance abuse, not meeting basic qualifications, and not completing the application form.

Training and Advancement

Most of the organizations like to promote internally, although several say that skills often don't transfer between jobs. All encourage employees to participate in training and career development. Some of their techniques for career development include offering training internally and giving employees release time for training.

Other Comments

Participants had a number of comments about employing and working with ex-felons in programs. They said that it was extremely important for ex-felons to get GEDs if they had not graduated from high school. They suggested requiring the GED and soft skills training as part of employment program participation. Participants stated that partnering or mentoring on the job site and referral to support services could help combat substance abuse. Also, participants reported pressures on some ex-felons find jobs within only a few weeks of release. Because of this pressure and offenders' need for income and steady work, quick placement was emphasized as very important.

Summary: Key Findings from Focus Group with Social Services Employers

- Social Services employers generally do not discriminate against ex-felons, particularly if the applicant has been out of prison for a while. Occupations that had legal or contractual restrictions about hiring ex-felons were the exception.
- Work experience and dedication to the organization's client population are generally more important than training and educational requirements. Employers also look for the ability to show up on time.
- Entry-level jobs pay \$8-\$15 per hour and provide benefits after one to six months. Most organizations do not have internal advancement systems, but they do work with employees to access training.
- Social Services employers recruit primarily through online and newspaper postings, as well as through referrals from job training programs (including their own programs).
- Quick placement of participants is important for the success of an employment program.

SPECIAL TRADE CONSTRUCTION

Occupations Accessible to Ex-Felons and In-Demand

Occupations in all of the Trades are available to ex-felons, as these employers don't ask about criminal records. The employers did not mention that ex-felons are not allowed to work on some jobs with government contracts, as was brought up in the focus group with ex-felons in Special Trade Construction. In order to join the unions, applicants generally need a GED and a valid driver's license. Beyond that, training and advancement take place on-site and through apprenticeship programs.

There is less work available November through March. During this period, even “core” members of a contractor’s team may not always be working. The workload is heaviest during the summer months. Positions for journey-level Carpenters and Machine Operators are hardest to fill, as apprentices tend to specialize rather than learning the whole trade. Employers report high turnover due to projects’ being postponed and seasonal slowdowns.

Wages and Benefits

Entry-level positions pay 40% of base wages in the trade. Base wages vary by trade, from \$35 per hour for Laborers to \$42 per hour for Carpenters. Benefit levels and eligibility depend on the union, but are available in all trades.

Outreach and Recruitment Practices

Construction employers recruit through local unions and hiring halls. In addition to the unions, they sometimes use the services of Ella Hill Hutch, Young Community Developers, the Human Rights Commission, Mission Hiring Hall, Chinese for Affirmative Action, and Cypress Mandela, depending on the location of the project.

Screening and Hiring Practices

Union hiring practices vary by trade. Some only accept applications at certain times of year, and the speed with which a person is placed depends on the amount of work available. Once a contractor receives an application, it is processed in less than a week. The employers have their own written application forms. One employer conducts interviews for all positions, while the others interview only for specialty positions. They all require initial drug testing. None ask about criminal history. They say a person's attitude towards their work is far more important than a clean record.

The participants value pre-screening by organizations such as Mission Hiring Hall. They look for proper construction-site attire, appropriate comportment, and knowledge of safety and harassment guidelines. Failed drug tests are the most common reasons to eliminate applicants. After hiring, there is a 40-hour probation period at the end of which new hires may be let go for reasons including inappropriate attitude and poor performance.

Training and Advancement

The employers all promote internally. Advancement training takes place through union apprenticeship programs, in conjunction with work experience.

Summary: Key Findings from Focus Group with Special Trade Construction Employers

- Occupations in all the trades are open to ex-felons, and these employers do not ask about criminal history.
- Once a worker has met the basic requirements of the union (which includes a GED), he or she automatically has access to good wages, benefits, and advancement training.
- The hiring process may be slow, and the time between enrollment in the union and finding regular work can also be significant. Construction work is seasonal, with November to March being slow.
- The employers interviewed recruit from the unions and non-profit or public job training and referral programs.
- Entry-level jobs pay \$14-\$17 per hour. After finishing apprenticeship programs, construction workers can earn \$35-\$42 per hour.
- Poor attitude and substance abuse are the primary reasons employers reject job applicants. All employers interviewed conduct drug screening as part of the hiring

process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective sector strategies seek to create win-win outcomes for employers and low-income job seekers (offenders in this case) by identifying and capitalizing on “leverage points” with each group. “Leverage points” are points of influence with stakeholders that are powerful enough to secure their buy-in and participation in an industry-specific employment strategy for criminal offenders in the San Francisco Bay Area. These leverage points highlight gaps in the system, where the connections between the stakeholders are not smooth and are causing difficulties for offenders in finding good jobs, for employers in finding good employees, and for training providers in effectively training offenders and placing them with employers.

In the Construction industry, offenders are most in need of assistance to ensure yearlong employment. The cyclical nature of the industry and the difficulty of getting referrals through the unions mean that ex-offenders are frequently unemployed, particularly during the winter months. Employers need thoroughly trained employees, particularly in some of the higher-skilled trades.

In the Social Services industry, offenders need help moving up career ladders and finding jobs with higher wages. Ex-offenders liked working in the industry but found wages too low and moving up difficult. Employers in the Social Services industry need employees who are dedicated to their work.

The following set of recommendations is made with these leverage points in mind. They are designed to improve the transition for offenders from the time of their conviction to successful employment. They are also intended to address the needs of employers in the potential target industries, Social Services and Special Trade Construction. These recommendations are intended as a starting point for discussion among employers in the targeted industry(s), offenders, community-based organizations, public agencies, education and training providers, and other interested parties.

1. **Make soft skills and other training more attractive.** In both industries, it is important to have soft skills such as the ability to show up consistently, a good attitude about work, and communications skills. Ex-felons wanted training to be very practical (preferably hands-on) and in a single location. Due to the need to find job placements quickly (see the following recommendation), initial training should be short-term, with a focus on job search skills. Training (particularly GED and basic skills for those who don't have these) should be a required part of an employment program in order to encourage participation. Preferably, an employment program should either pay participants a stipend or be free-of-charge and offer transportation assistance, food, and other incentives.
2. **Place participants in jobs quickly.** Some ex-felons may be under pressure from transitional services to find a job quickly after release. Others may simply lose patience with the job search, and go back to the easy money available through a criminal lifestyle. An employment program might partner with a temporary employment agency, operate an in-house job placement agency, or set up a sheltered work environment (although moving employees from such programs into mainstream work is challenging and would need special attention). Internships could be another way for offenders to learn while being employed, and would fit with offenders' wish for training to be hands-on.
3. **Match felons with mentors.** Ex-felons in both industries said that mentors, both in and outside their industries, were vital to helping them maintain legitimate work during “rough periods” and understand their work. In Social Services, ex-felons said that mentors in the industry would help them identify career paths and training opportunities as well as potential jobs.



4. **Advocate for ex-felons with drug courts and probation/parole officers.** Although employers in the focus groups didn't mention any problems, ex-felons in both focus groups cited difficulties scheduling appointments around training and work. An employment program could focus on working with drug courts and probation/parole officers to address these issues. If that failed, the program could work with employers to help them understand the difficulties. It may be that employers are more open to working around required appointments than ex-felons believe them to be.
5. **Address substance abuse issues.** Employers and ex-felons in both industries mentioned substance abuse as a major barrier to finding and retaining employment. Participants should be screened carefully for substance abuse, and those with substance abuse problems must undergo intensive and ongoing treatment and supervision if they are to move successfully into long-term, stable employment.
6. **Provide flexible transportation supports.** Ex-felons in both groups identified transportation as a barrier to training and employment. In the Construction group, public transportation was not an option due to off-hours schedules and distant workplaces. In Social Services, some participants found the public transportation system dangerous during the hours they traveled. A flexible assistance program offering a range of resources – gas cards, assistance obtaining a driver's license, a centralized database of local residents interested in carpooling or in trading car repair for other services, etc. – could be developed. Other possible strategies to explore include expansion of the car/commute share programs and creation of vanpools from the residential areas to central (and safer) locations on the public transit line.

In addition to the general recommendations listed above, there are two additional recommendations that relate specifically to the Social Services industry.

7. **Work to raise wages by helping incumbent workers advance into higher-paying jobs and researching and educating organizations about incentive programs they are eligible for.** Ex-felons working in the Social Services industry have difficulty surviving on their salaries. In order to retain offenders in the industry, it will be necessary to help them access upgrade training (possibly including getting a Bachelor's Degree) and the kinds of experience they need for higher-paying work. Additionally, the program could help raise wages by educating non-profit employers about incentive programs for hiring ex-offenders they may be able to benefit from.
8. **Improve the connection between offenders and job announcements/openings.** Ex-felons in the Social Services group reported spending up to six months looking for work. Employers in this industry use online postings and classifieds and some referrals through job training and placement agencies, while ex-felons say they are most able to find jobs through personal networks. An employment program will need to teach ex-offenders to respond more effectively to job announcements posted online and in newspapers. The program should also advertise itself to employers as a source of workers, and it may be able to work with offenders to improve resume-writing skills.

NEXT STEPS

This report is intended to serve as a program planning and design tool for an industry-specific sector employment initiative with offenders in San Francisco. In spring 2003, the results of this research will be presented to the San Francisco District Attorney's Street to Work project and to local employers, training providers, ex-offenders, and funders. It is also our hope that the data collected here will prove useful for a variety of planning efforts. If a sector initiative is to happen, six critical next steps must be accomplished in order to transition the Initiative from the research to the implementation phase.

1. **Select a target industry.** While both Social Services and Special Trade Construction are promising industries for work with criminal offenders, a sector initiative requires immersion in the industry to an extent that is exceedingly difficult with two industries. The initiative should move ahead with whichever industry makes the most sense given its mission, goals, and capacity. The Industry Comparison Chart in the Appendices may provide a good starting point for making a selection.
2. **Identify a lead agency to spearhead the Initiative.** By definition, sector initiatives are partnerships among a number of different organizations, each responsible for performing a different function or providing a different service. Therefore, the lead agency is not responsible for implementing all of the sector strategies or program components by itself, although it may take responsibility for some. As the name implies, the primary role of the lead agency is to provide overall leadership to the initiative, to house its administrative and management functions, and to serve as the fiscal agent. The lead agency also houses a full-time staff person to coordinate the initiative. That person has the responsibility of brokering relationships among employers in the target industry and other key stakeholders, including local partners with whom the lead agency may subcontract to carry out the program strategies.
3. **Convene an Implementation Committee.** The Implementation Committee is a working group that is responsible for meeting on a regular basis to plan, design, develop resources for, implement, monitor and help to assess the Initiative. Employers in the target industry should comprise one-half to two-thirds of the Implementation Committee. This is to ensure that the strategies selected are appropriately designed to meet the economic and workforce development needs of local employers in the target industry. The remaining members may include representatives from the criminal justice system, education and training institutions, support service providers, and community-based organizations, among others, that will represent the needs of offenders.
4. **Prioritize which strategies to focus on during the first year of implementation.** Due to constraints on financial resources and organizational capacity, it is unlikely that all of the strategies identified in this report can be implemented simultaneously. Moreover, the process of identifying appropriate sector strategies is an iterative one – the strategies will change over time in response to economic and policy changes, and to meet the continuously evolving needs of the local community and the target industry. Therefore, two or three strategies should be prioritized for the initial phase of implementation and revisited at the end of the first program year.
5. **Develop an outline of the program design and a projected budget.** Based on the Initiative's priority strategies and desired outcomes, the lead agency and the Implementation Committee will jointly develop a program design that specifies which piece of the program will



be carried out by each partner. A projected budget for the first year of implementation will also be developed for submission to potential funders.

6. ***Secure resources to support the implementation phase.*** Sector initiatives frequently rely on a “patchwork” of funding from different sources. In other communities, they have successfully drawn on a wide range of funding streams for support, including public monies, foundation grants, and corporate support.

APPENDIX I: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOLS

SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY EX-OFFENDER SECTOR PROJECT

Ex-Offender Focus Group Outline & Questions

I. WELCOME AND OVERVIEW (3 minutes)

Greet people and explain briefly who you and the co-facilitators are. Give a brief explanation of the project and describe the purpose of today's focus group. Something like this:

"Hi, my name is (name) and I work for a nonprofit organization in Oakland called the National Economic Development & Law Center. This focus group session is part of a project that is being supported by (name of organization that did recruiting) and some other organizations in San Francisco that are trying to create better job opportunities for ex-offenders.

The purpose of today's focus group project is to get some information about your experience working in the Social Services/Construction industry. The information will be used to design programs that can improve the quality of jobs in that industry and to improve access for ex-offenders to good jobs with benefits. During the next couple of hours, we want to get first hand information from you about your experiences seeking employment and working *in the Social Services/Construction industry since being convicted of a felony.*

Specifically, we will be asking you questions to help us:

- 1) Verify what types of jobs you have held since being convicted of a felony;
- 2) Learn about how and why you got into those jobs;
- 3) Get a general sense of the work environment in the Social Services/Construction industry; and
- 4) Understand the challenges you face in getting and keeping a good job."

II. LOGISTICS AND GROUND RULES (8 minutes)

"Before we get started, I'd like to go over our agenda and a few logistics, and then have people introduce themselves." *(Have the agenda posted on a flip chart and refer to it.)*

- I. Welcome and Overview (3 minutes)
- II. Logistics and Ground Rules (8 minutes)
- III. Introductions (10 minutes)
- IV. Background Information (20 minutes)
- V. Job Search (18 minutes)
- VI. Job Retention and Advancement (18 minutes)
- VII. Challenges (20 minutes)
- VIII. Training (20 minutes)
- IX. Other Issues / Wrap-Up (3 minutes)

"Now let's go over some logistics:

- a. This focus group session will last approximately **2 hours**.
- b. Please help yourself to any of the **refreshments** at anytime.
- c. The **bathroom** is. However, we would like for you to stay in the room as much as possible in order to get fuller participation and discussions.

- d. After today's session we will have a **\$30 cash stipend** to thank you for your time."

"These are the ground rules for today's session:

- a. We're recording the session so that we can transcribe the notes later, but I want you to know that everything said here is strictly **confidential**. We will not be using your names or anything else that can identify you, and we ask that you not repeat anything that is said outside of this room.
- b. We want everyone to **participate** in the discussion, so please be courteous and allow others to share their views and comments.
- c. There are **no right or wrong answers** to the questions we are going to ask you. So feel free to be candid with your responses.
- d. Also, everyone here has the right to **agree to disagree**.
- e. My colleagues and I are here simply to serve as facilitators and recorders. **We don't have the answers** to these questions, which is why we need you to help us out."

III. INTRODUCTIONS & ICE BREAKER (10 minutes)

"Now, let's go around the room and have each person tell us:

- your name, and
- whether you are currently employed in the Social Services/Construction industry or whether you used to be." *(If a participant says that he was but no longer is employed in the target industry, ask: "When you were employed in the Social Services/ Construction industry, was it before or after you were convicted of a felony?")*

"Thank you. Now let's begin our discussion. Remember, we only want information about the job you got in the Social Services/Construction industry after being convicted of a felony. So no information about other jobs you may have in addition or other jobs you had before you were convicted."

IV. BACKGROUND INFORMATION (20 minutes)

Purpose: This section is designed to give us an idea of each participant's occupation, wages and benefits within the target industry. These questions should also allow the focus group members to become comfortable with the format, the subject matter, and each other.

1. What is/was your job title when you worked in the Social Services/Construction industry?
2. What is/was your hourly wage at this job?
 - a. Raise your hand if part of your earnings are being garnished for child support, overdue taxes, or some other reason. *(State the hand count out loud for the recorder.)* For those of you who raised your hand, are they garnishing about ¼ of your check, 1/3, ½, or some other amount?
3. On average, how many hours a week do/did you work at this job?
 - a. Raise your hand if you have another job in addition to the one in the Social Services/Construction industry? *(State the hand count aloud for the recorder.)*
4. What benefits, if any, do/did you receive at your job in the Social Services/Construction industry (vacation, health, dental, etc.)?
 - a. Please raise your hand if you get no benefits at your job. *(State the hand count aloud for the recorder.)*

V. JOB SEARCH (18 minutes)

Purpose: To learn how participants found employment in the Social Services/Construction industry. If there are common avenues, these may be a starting point for a targeted effort to recruit ex-offenders

5. After you finished serving time for your felony, how long did it take you to find a job?
 - a. During that time, how did you get by without a paycheck? *Probes: What types of support services did/do you utilize?*
6. What obstacles did you face in finding a job?
 - a. What services would have helped you to find a job more easily or more quickly?
7. How did you find your job, or where would you go to find out about job openings? *Probe for specifics – name of paper, website or agency, word of mouth, etc.*
8. What led you to a job in the Social Services/Construction industry? *Probe: Did you have previous experience in the industry? Did a past employer re-hire you? Did a family member get you the job?*
9. How many people revealed their criminal record on the job application or to the person who interviewed you before you were hired? *State hand count aloud for recorder.*
 - a. Of those who did, how many specified the type of felony you were convicted of?
10. How many people have successfully tried to clean up their record by requesting an expungement or a Certificate of Rehabilitation? (State hand count.)
 - a. If so, do you think this helped you get a job?

VI. JOB RETENTION AND ADVANCEMENT (18 minutes)

Purpose: To learn what things might prevent and promote job retention, and to learn what knowledge participants have about opportunities to advance within the industry. We want to get a basic understanding of the participants' opinions and understanding as this may indicate their interest in

11. How many jobs have you had since being convicted of a felony? *If appropriate, ask:*
 - a. What are the reasons why you've switched jobs? *Probe: Have you ever lost a job because an employer discovered after hiring you that you had a criminal record?*
12. What do/did you like about your job with the Social Services/Construction industry?
13. What do/did you dislike about your job with the Social Services/Construction industry?
14. How many people would like to stay employed or become re-employed in the Social Services/Construction industry? (State hand count out loud for recorder.)
 - a. For those who didn't raise their hand, what two things would make you want to stay in the Social Services/Construction industry?
15. From your job in these positions (*refer to flip chart*), do you think you can advance to other positions within the Social Services/Construction industry?
 - a. If you said yes, what positions can you advance to?
 - b. What type of experience or skills do you think you would need to advance?
 - c. What hourly wage would you say these positions pay?

VII. CHALLENGES (20 minutes)

Purpose: The questions are intended to gather information about the range and diversity of issues that might affect the participants' ability to retain and advance in jobs within the target industry. What are the structural issues that may prevent individuals from retaining or advancing within the industry? Are there



16. What things make/made it difficult for you to be at your Social Services/Construction industry job on time every day and ready to work for your entire shift? *If the following don't come up on their own, ask about them specifically. For each question, ask for a show of hands to see how many people face this issue, and state the hand count aloud. Probe to find out if these issues are personal or structural.*
 - a. Do the requirements of your parole or probation interfere with your job in any way? *(Probe for specifics.)*
 - b. Does substance abuse or participation in a rehab program interfere with your job? *(Probe for specifics: Current use or rehab? Your use or someone else's?)*
 - c. Is transportation an issue? *(Probe for specifics: Can't get a driver's license? Have no car? No public transportation goes to your work site?)*
 - d. Is childcare an issue for you? *(Probe for specifics.)*
17. What kinds of things would prevent you from advancing to a higher position in the Social Services/Construction industry, or from applying for a better job in the industry? *Write these on flipchart.*
 - a. How many people here feel that these things would keep you from advancing? *State hand count aloud for recorder.*

VIII. TRAINING (20 minutes)

Purpose: What are the issues that affect the participants' interest in or ability to attend training to advance to better jobs? Are there structural issues that are common to some participants, and if so, will the program design be able to accommodate them? Are there

18. How do you hear about training opportunities, or where would you go to find out about training? *Probe for specifics.*
19. How many people have had training or taken classes related to the Social Services/ Construction industry? *State hand count aloud for recorder.*
 - a. If you raised your hand, what kind of training and where?
20. How many of you would attend training now if it could lead to a better job in the Social Services/Construction industry? *State hand count aloud for recorder.*
21. For those who have attended *any* kind of training before, what did you like about it?
 - a. What did you dislike?
22. Is there anything in particular that might prevent you from attending training?
23. How about anything that would encourage you to go?
24. How long would you be willing to attend training if it could improve your chances of getting a good job or moving up?
 - a. If you were to attend training, what times or days of the week would be best?
25. If training were available outside of your neighborhood, would you be willing to go?
 - a. If not, why not?
26. Would you be willing and able to pay for training if it could improve your chances of getting a good job or moving up?
 - a. If yes, how much could you spend each month on training?

X. OTHER ISSUES / WRAP-UP (3 minutes)

Purpose: To make sure we haven't missed anything that would be relevant to the research.

27. Is there anything else about the Social Services/Construction industry or about employment in general that anyone would like to add before we end?

“Thank you all very much for participating. The information you shared with us today is very valuable and will help us to develop better employment services for ex-offenders. We have envelopes with a \$30 stipend to thank you for your time. You must sign your name on this sheet to show that you received it.”



SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY EX-OFFENDER SECTOR PROJECT

Employer Focus Group Outline and Questions

I. WELCOME AND OVERVIEW (4 minutes)

Welcome everyone and thank them for coming. Introduce yourself and your team (co-facilitator, recorder and others, if any) and explain your roles. Give a little background about the sector project and the purpose of the focus group. Something like this:

“Hi my name is ___ and I’m with the National Economic Development & Law Center, a nonprofit in Oakland. This focus group session is part of a sector research project that is being led by NEDLC and the San Francisco District Attorney’s Office. Sector projects are innovative programs, services and policies that build the competitiveness of businesses in a specific industry while helping low-income people to reach economic self-sufficiency through employment in that industry at the same time.

This project is specifically designed to gather information about Bay Area industries in which ex-offenders are employed. The information will be used to help service agencies work more effectively with businesses that hire ex-offenders so that the employment relationship is more beneficial for both the employer and the worker. The project will also examine the effectiveness of workforce development strategies as a means of reducing recidivism. Data collected from two Bay Area agencies that serve ex-offenders indicates that many are concentrated in the Social Services/Construction industry. A series of focus groups, including this one, will help us to understand how and why ex-offenders come to be employed in this industry, and to describe the type and quality of jobs that they are able access.

It’s very important to understand that during this focus group, whenever we refer to “ex-offenders” we are specifically talking about felony offenders. Today we will be asking you to help us:

- 1) Verify the accuracy of our data about the jobs that ex-offenders are able to access;
- 2) Get a sense of your outreach, recruitment, screening and hiring process;
- 3) Develop a general picture of the work environment for specific jobs;
- 4) Understand your policies and opinions about hiring ex-offenders; and
- 5) Understand the opportunities or challenges your business faces in meeting its workforce needs.

Post the agenda on a flip chart where everyone can see it and walk them through the agenda items.

- I. Welcome and Overview (4 minutes)
- II. Logistics and Ground Rules (3 minutes)
- III. Introductions (10 minutes)
- IV. Verify Accessible Occupations (20 minutes)
- V. Outreach and Recruitment (5 minutes)
- VI. Screening and Selection (20 minutes)
- VII. Employing Ex-Offenders (15 minutes)
- VIII. Work environment (10 minutes)
- IX. Other issues / Wrap-Up / Drawing (3 minutes)

II. LOGISTICS AND GROUND RULES (3 minutes)

Inform the group that you will cover a few logistics before we begin:

- The focus group session will last approximately **1½ hours**.
- **Refreshments** are provided; help yourself at anytime.
- Point out where the **restrooms** are located.
- Ask everyone to stay to the end of the session when there will be a **drawing** for dinner for two.

Go over the ground rules for the session:

- Because we want to get full participation and capture each and everyone’s perspectives, we ask that they give us their **undivided attention** this morning.
- Please **turn off your cell phones** and pagers.
- We ask that you to be **courteous** and allow others to share their views and comments.
- The session is going to be recorded so that we can transcribe the notes later, but everything said here is strictly **confidential**. We will not share your names or comments with others, and ask that you do the same. The focus group results will be shared in aggregated form only.
- There are **no wrong or right** answers to these questions, so feel free to be candid. Everyone has the right to agree to disagree.
- My colleagues and I are here simply to serve as facilitators and recorders; **we don’t presume to have the answers** to these questions.

III. INTRODUCTIONS (10 minutes)

Go around the room and have each of the participants share the following. (Have these things listed on a flipchart.)

- Name.
- Title and brief description of position.
- Company name and type of company.
- Number of Bay Area employees.

“Thank you. Let’s get started.”

IV. VERIFY ACCESSIBLE DEMAND OCCUPATIONS (20 minutes)

Purpose: To verify which occupations ex-offenders are able to access, and to confirm previously gathered data about the projected growth, skill sets and wages for those occupations.

Have a list of the occupations that ex-offenders have successfully accessed posted on a flip chart.

27. According to case file data, ex-offenders are employed in the following Social Services/Construction industry occupations. (*Refer to flip chart.*) What occupations are at the next level up from these ones? (*Add to flip chart.*)
28. What are the skill sets, educational level or other requirements for these occupations?
 1. Which of these occupations are considered entry-level?
29. What are the average wages associated with these occupations?
 1. What benefits do workers in these positions receive, and when do they become eligible for those benefits?
30. Which, if any, of these occupations are generally part-time positions?
 1. Are any of them seasonal or temporary? Which?
 2. Do any of them require workers to be on call? Which?
 3. Do any of them have non-traditional or seasonal work schedules? Which?

31. Would company policy, state regulations, or some other *institutional* barrier PREVENT your company from hiring a felony offender for any of the positions on the flip chart?
1. If yes: Which ones, and what is the specific barrier?

V. OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT (5 minutes)

Purpose: To learn how employers conduct outreach and recruit job applicants.

Keep the same flipchart used above visible.

32. Which of these positions are the hardest to fill, and why?
33. How and where do you recruit for job openings? (*Probe for specifics such as names of newspapers, organizations website, etc*)
1. Do you use any nonprofit job placement services, and if so, which?
34. What geographic area do you tend to recruit from, and why?

VI. SCREENING AND SELECTION PROCESS (20 minutes)

Purpose: To learn about how employers screen and decide whether or not to hire job applicants, and to find out what skills and characteristics are most important to employers.

35. What is your company's application and interview process? *Prompts:*
1. Do applicants have to pass a written exam?
 2. Do applicants have to pass a physical exam?
 3. Do you conduct pre-employment drug testing?
36. Do you ask job candidates at any time during the application or interview process whether they have a criminal record?
37. Do you conduct criminal background checks or fingerprinting, and if so, how do you decide which applicants to run a check on?
1. How many of you get information about the number of offenses on an applicant's record? (*State hand count for note taker.*)
 2. How many of you get information about the specific offense on an applicant's record? (*State hand count for note taker.*) Are there specific crimes that always result in a decision not to hire, and if so, what are they?
38. What are the most important "soft" skills, characteristics or abilities your company looks for when screening an applicant? (*List on flipchart*)
39. What is the most common reason for eliminating an applicant?
40. After receiving a qualified application, how long does it take to schedule the candidate for an interview?
- a. After a positive interview, how long until the job offer is made?
 - b. Do you lose job candidates during your hiring process? If so, why and what proportion of applicants are lost?
 - c. Would the hiring process take longer for a candidate with a criminal background? If so, how long, and what accounts for the delay?

VII. EMPLOYING EX-OFFENDERS (15 minutes)

Purpose: To identify employers' attitudes and perceptions about hiring ex-offenders, and to identify possible strategies for alleviating any concerns.

41. Does your company have an explicit policy against hiring ex-offenders?
IF YES:
- What is the rationale behind that policy? (*E.g. safety risk is too great; insurance risk is too great; they usually aren't qualified, etc.*)
 - Are there instances in which an exception to the policy would be made? If so, what are they?
 - What plays a greater role in the decision about whether to hire an ex-offender: company policy or the interviewer's personal opinion and perceptions of the applicant?
- IF NO:*
- Would you knowingly hire someone with a single felony conviction if he were otherwise a qualified job applicant?
 - Would you hire a qualified candidate with more than one offense on his or her record?
 - Would you terminate a good employee if you learned later that he had a felony conviction?
42. Does anyone have experience working with employees who are ex-offenders?
- How do ex-offenders compare to other employees in terms of overall job performance? Retention?
 - Are there particular challenges you have faced in working with employees who are ex-offenders?
43. What are your major concerns about hiring ex-offenders?
44. Is there anything that would help alleviate those concerns?
- Is anyone here aware of government programs that provide incentives for employers to hire ex-offenders (e.g., the Work Opportunity Tax Credit and the Federal Bonding Program)? Has anyone taken advantage of such incentives, and if so, would you use it again? If not, why not?

VIII. WORK ENVIRONMENT (15 minutes)

Purpose: To find out what the internal environment is like for employees at workplaces in the target industry.

45. Do you encourage employees to participate in training and career development?
- What kinds of training for potential or incumbent employees do you provide or pay for?
Probe: Do you provide college tuition reimbursements, release time, training stipends or other incentives?
46. Is employee turnover and retention a problem at your company? *If so:*
- Which positions on the flip chart have the highest turnover? What are the turnover rates?
 - What are the main causes of turnover?
47. Would you say your company generally promotes internally? If not, why not?
48. What percentage of the workforce at your company is unionized?

IX. WRAP-UP / DRAWING (5 minutes)

Purpose: To make sure we haven't missed anything that would be relevant to the sector research and to let the participating employers know that there will be ongoing opportunities for them to help shape the direction of this project.

49. Are there any other relevant issues that we have not discussed?

Conclusion:

- Tell people that in order to ensure the accuracy of our note taking, we will do a write-up of today's focus group and distribute it to them.
- Hold the drawing.
- Thank everyone for their participation.

SOCIAL SERVICES: MOST COMMON OCCUPATIONS AMONG EX-FELONS

1. Counselors, All Other
2. Social and Human Service Assistants
3. Child Care Workers
4. Truck Drivers, Light or Delivery Services
5. Stock Clerks and Order Fillers
6. Self-Enrichment Education Teachers
7. Receptionists and Information Clerks
8. Painters, Construction and Maintenance
9. Helpers, Construction Trades, All Other
10. Customer Service Representatives

SPECIAL TRADE CONSTRUCTION: MOST COMMON OCCUPATIONS AMONG EX-FELONS

1. Carpenters
2. Roofers
3. Helpers, Construction Trades, All Other
4. Truck Drivers, Heavy and Tractor-Trailer
5. Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters
6. Painters, Construction and Maintenance
7. Cement Masons and Concrete Finishers

APPENDIX II: INDUSTRY COMPARISON CHART

	<i>Social Services</i>	<i>Special Trade Construction</i>
Ex-Offender Interest	Moderate: Some ex-offenders wish to remain in this industry, but most would prefer to find work in another industry, primarily due to low wages.	High: Ex-offenders working in this industry want to make it their career.
Opportunities for Ex-Felons	Moderate to High: While employers prefer to hire people who have been out of the criminal justice system for a while, most occupations in this industry are open to ex-felons.	High: Very few contractors exclude ex-felons. In general, criminal background is not an issue.
Accessibility by Skill Level	Moderate to High: Many occupations require a GED, and higher-level positions require a Bachelor's degree, but in general experience matters more.	Moderate to High: Almost all occupations require a GED or high school diploma (particularly in the unions). Additional training is provided by the unions.
Career Ladders	Moderate to High: Advancement is encouraged by employers in this industry, although many do not have internal career ladders.	High: Once entry into a union is achieved, the apprenticeship programs support a clear career ladder.
Self-sufficiency Wages	Moderate to Low: While better than wages for retail or food service, few high-demand occupations would support an adult living alone at entry-level. With increased experience, most would support an adult and several would support a dependant.	High: Most high-demand occupations would support an adult living alone at entry-level. Nearly all would support a dependant with increased experience.
Demand for Workers	Moderate: While not seasonal, demand for workers depends on government and foundation funding. Currently, employers are reluctant to hire people without a demonstrated interest in the field.	Moderate (seasonal): Certain occupations are in constant high demand, but entry-level workers are often unemployed in the winter months.
Availability of Transportation	Moderate: Social Services employers are generally accessible by public transportation, but late work hours and off-hours shifts sometimes make commutes dangerous.	Low: Construction employees frequently work in areas not well served by public transportation, and must travel off hours. Many construction jobs are unavailable to people without cars.

