

Following are 12 recommendations for the development of reentry guides:ⁱ

1. Honest and Hopeful

An example of this style of writing is found in the introduction of the Tucson, Arizona handbook, *Guidelines for Getting Out* ⁱⁱ

The transition to life after prison is a big challenge, and this brochure is designed to help you through this exciting but often difficult time. If you take to heart the following suggestions, we think these resources can help you to be successful with rebuilding.

Do your homework. Make as many arrangements for yourself as you can before you get out. Use this brochure to write to agencies for help.

Give yourself time to adjust. Don't try to accomplish everything right away. Take time alone or with family and close friends only. Be patient with yourself and know it might take you a while to reach your goals. You may feel depressed or overwhelmed. This is normal – just take some time to heal.

Ask for help. There is an answer to every question you have. All you need to do is ask. This does not make you weak, it makes you smart. Call the agencies in this pamphlet. If they can't help you, ask them who can. Keep asking until you get the right answer.

2. Provide letters of support and sponsorship from other former inmates.

Include positive statements by formerly incarcerated individuals dispersed throughout the resource:

Been in the game since I was 12. By the time I was 22, I was through. I gave up the game because I had children and I didn't want them comin' into the jail to see me. I'm soft but I know where I come from. ⁱⁱⁱ

3. Prioritize crucial first steps, and include a reference list for less immediate issues.

A reentry guide should focus on the immediate, crucial aspects of moving toward life stability within the first few months after release; true self-sufficiency and social reintegration should be handled through other routes.

4. Incorporate the guide into a training curriculum with in-person support.

The most effective way to prepare individuals for reentry is through in-person prerelease instructional programs. Introducing the guide and its contents during prerelease classes will familiarize those incarcerated and give them a chance to make arrangements before release to increase the likelihood of successful transition to the community.

5. Provide the guide well ahead of release to help prepare a smoother transition.

Having the guide available in advance will allow individuals to consider employment, housing, and other topics prior to release, weighing the feasibility and benefits of their options. The guide will also provide a basis for program officers or case managers to discuss these options with transitioning offenders. This process of personal orientation and familiarization is essential to maximizing the positive effect of resource packets.

6. Include content that helps to manage specific challenges.

Sample text of job letters and resume layouts can make guides more engaging and effective in helping plan for reentry.

7. Include maps of cities, transportation routes, and the locations of major service providers.

Maps of geographic areas with different service providers marked can be an excellent source of information, especially for those with minimal reading skills.

8. Include informative, motivational text, being conscious of prevalent literacy levels.

Remember that many inmates have learning disabilities and have difficulty reading above a sixth-grade level. Therefore, the complexity and length of text in a guide must be compatible with the literacy levels of the intended audience.

9. Include only service providers committed and accessible to individuals with a history of involvement in the criminal justice system.

The clients should be referred to agencies that best meet the needs of the inmate population. Some agencies specialize in working with women or other distinct groups of offenders. Both the client and the agency must be comfortable working with one another. Agencies may assert that they work with the formerly incarcerated but in practice seek to waitlist them or refer them to another agency.

10. Be sensitive to language barriers.

The issue of developing foreign language versions for certain jurisdictions is also important to consider.

11. Keep the guide small, portable, and discreet.

Make the guide reasonable and attractive for individuals to carry with them. If possible, the guide should be designed to be transportable in a back pocket. Gang colors and titles that would mark users as formerly incarcerated should be avoided. These small design features are likely to have important effects on clients' use of the guide.

12. Evaluate reactions before and after the publication of the guide.

Objective evaluation of the guide to refine the first edition and subsequent revisions is the only way to gauge effectiveness. Focus groups and questionnaires with those incarcerated, corrections staff, provider agencies, and transitional experts can be used to help improve content.

ⁱ Mellow, J., & Dickinson, J. M. (2006). The role of prerelease handbooks for prisoner reentry. *Federal Probation*, 70(1), 70–76.

ⁱⁱ Tucson Planning Council for the Homeless. (2012). *Guidelines on getting out: A handbook to help you prepare for your release in Tucson, Arizona*.

ⁱⁱⁱ New York City Commission on Human Rights. (2005). *Making it happen & staying home*. New York City Commission on Human Rights.