

Understanding Success: Program Evaluation Options for Root & Rebound



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Disclaimer

This study has been prepared for Root & Rebound in Oakland, CA. The student author conducted this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Public Policy at Mills College. The judgments and conclusions are solely those of the author, and are not necessarily endorsed by the Mills College Public Policy Program, the sponsoring Client organization, or any other organization or agency.

Executive Summary

Successful Reentry is important:

The client for this Masters Policy Report is Root & Rebound based in Oakland, CA. It is a nonprofit reentry advocacy center that provides direct legal services, training, and education for individuals in reentry, the ongoing process of reentering society after time spent incarcerated, and their support systems. Root & Rebound primarily serve the Bay Area, but its service population extends across California. Through direct legal services, training, and education, Root & Rebound empowers individuals in reentry by equipping them with the tools they need to achieve “reentry readiness”. “In the world of reentry, ‘readiness’ means a person has the tools, education, and knowledge to navigate and maneuver through the myriad barriers and policies he or she will encounter throughout the reentry process” (Katcher Reentry Readiness). Similar to education readiness, reentry readiness is more effective when it begins early. Root & Rebound believes in starting the reentry process early enough that reentering individuals have enough time to understand their options and gain access to basic needs such as housing and employment. Without the knowledge that Root & Rebound provides to this population, many reentering people would be released from prison or jail without the resources to help them successfully assimilate back into society.

Social services for the reentering population are especially lacking. The scarcity of resources from a governmental perspective makes way for nonprofits to work with and for this population. With scarce resources for nonprofits that work with the reentering and/or prison populations, nonprofits need to show their worthiness for those scarce funding opportunities. Program evaluations are an effective way for nonprofits to showcase their strengths and work on bettering their weaknesses, in order to be successful competitors in the nonprofit funding arena.

Problem Statement:

In the United States, there are currently more than 2.3 million incarcerated people. Out of those 2.3 million people currently incarcerated, 636,000 people are released every year. Too few of those engaged with criminal justice system can advocate for themselves, and ensure post-incarceration success. In an effort to serve individuals in reentry and their

support systems, Root & Rebound attempts to equip them with the tools they need to strengthen their odds of success in reentry readiness. Root & Rebound completed its first full year of programmatic operations in 2015 and is entering a new phase of growth and development. As a new organization, it is imperative that it better understand its strengths and weaknesses in serving the reentry population. By implementing a program evaluation that suits its needs, Root & Rebound will be able to reassess its goals, communicate its impact to stakeholders, and acquire more funding. Without an evaluation plan, Root & Rebound risks understanding how well it is serving the reentry population, squandering its funding opportunities, and risking the success rates of its client population.

Recommendation:

After extensive research on program evaluation options and considering Root & Rebound's resources, I recommend a process evaluation in order to understand how Root & Rebound's services are being executed. Through a process evaluation, Root & Rebound can start to develop firm outcomes for success. After 2-4 years, I would then recommend implementing an outcome evaluation to understand if the services are meeting the outcome measurements. It is important for Root & Rebound to better understand how well its programs are being implemented.

In order for Root & Rebound to design and implement a process evaluation, it should take the following steps:

- Consistently improve the logic model I created for its use by involving stakeholders including board of directors and the service population. With input, Root & Rebound can start working to solidify outcomes.
- Apply for a grant that will cover the costs of the evaluation if the cost is a barrier.
 - If the cost of an evaluation is a serious impediment, find a graduate or PhD student experienced in program evaluations to complete a process evaluation. If a student were conducting the evaluation, I would recommend giving them a sufficient amount of time to complete it.

- If Root & Rebound is willing to invest in the process evaluation, hire a professional evaluator. This would be the ideal choice in terms of quality and the evaluator's experience in evaluations.
- Use the process evaluation to attract funders by communicating that Root & Rebound is progressing toward measuring outcomes and impact.
- In terms of evaluation methods, pre-service and post-service interviews and surveys are crucial. Root & Rebound is already doing this with surveys for trainings, but can definitely build pre and post-service surveys for the *Roadmap to Reentry* guide. I have included example surveys for the *Roadmap to Reentry* guide for Root & Rebound to implement.