



PEER SUPPORT DELIVERABLE:
REENTRY ADVOCACY PROJECT
(RAP) IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

APRIL 28, 2023

Table of Contents

Peer Support Deliverable Cover Letter	3
Table 1: Reentry Roundtable Strategic Plan Alignment with RAP Implementation Plan.....	5
RAP Visioning and Implementation Plan Report.....	7

Peer Support Deliverable Cover Letter

This cover letter and the attached report serve to provide written documentation of the completion of the Reentry Roundtable deliverable due April 30th, 2023: *Develop options for potential growth, expansion, and funding of the Reentry Advocacy Project (RAP) network and create an implementation plan, including building community both for persons who are justice system impacted and for their families and allies* with documentation including an implementation plan including growth and funding strategies.

The RAP visioning process this year has been a collaboration between the Reentry Roundtable and Reentry Advocacy Project leadership, folks who have attended RAP for years, stakeholders in the Reentry Roundtable network, and people who are system-impacted who have had very little engagement with RAP in the past but are ready to contribute to this newly reimagined space. Amanda Cassidy-Trejo led this entire journey in her role as Reentry Advocacy Fellow. We hope that Amanda's vivacious energy and love for her community shines through this report.

This is not the first time that the role of RAP has been renewed and reimagined. What is now the Reentry Advocacy Project started in 2012 as the Ex-Offenders Council. In 2016, the shift to Reentry Advocacy Project brought with it a person-centered culture change. With projects like RAP Speaks in 2018 and the Reentry Progress Report in 2020, RAP and Reentry Roundtable partnered together to tell the stories and lived experiences of people who have navigated reentry. These stories were woven into the Roundtable's advocacy efforts to address stigma and collateral consequences of incarceration.

These collaborative moments between RAP and the larger Reentry Roundtable network have been extremely powerful, but they have been *moments*, not sustained and nurtured collaboration. At worst, the relationship between RAP and Reentry Roundtable has been seen by some as inconsistent and transactional. Throughout the Reentry Roundtable strategic planning process, stakeholders asked: *Why isn't there a stronger connection between RAP and Reentry Roundtable? Why must the goals, perspectives, and feedback of people with lived experience be floated up from RAP to the Reentry Roundtable Planning Council? What if Reentry Roundtable's priorities were led by people with their own lived experience with the criminal legal system and reentry?* These questions were foundational to the development of a new long-term outcome for the Roundtable in the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan: *All persons with justice system involvement have what they need to survive and thrive including access to housing, a stable income, a support network to connect them to needed resources, and access to pathways to upward mobility.*

As the RAP Visioning process continued, it became clear that the emerging goals for RAP were directly aligned with the goals embedded in Reentry Roundtable's new Strategic Plan. The three goals of RAP Visioning (Peer Support & Community Space, Advocacy Leadership Pipeline, and Resource Bank) are interconnected with the five goals of the Reentry Roundtable Strategic Plan (Leadership & Career Development, Peer Network, Capacity Building, Advocacy, and Governance Structure). *Table 1: Reentry Roundtable Strategic Plan Alignment with RAP Visioning & Implementation Plan* displays connections

between RAP and Reentry Roundtable shared goals and strategies. The redesign of Reentry Roundtable's Governance Structure is foundational to all of the proposed strategies, and to the sustainability of both Reentry Roundtable and RAP.

The Roundtable will be working on a sustainability strategy over the next year and RAP goals will be included in the scope. Through the visioning process, the RAP network identified areas where more funding will be needed to support the development of these new functions of RAP. Three main categories emerged:

- 1) Funding to support capacity building and professional development for people with criminal legal system involvement (could include continued support and potential expansion of the Reentry Roundtable Advocacy Fellow & Mentor Program; and the development of a leadership cohort or training pipeline).
- 2) Funding to support RAP network infrastructure and events including RAP branded outreach and educational materials for community events, funding for regular meeting space, food, transportation, and incentives as well as for occasional symposia or resource fairs.
- 3) Funding to support a reentry resource database or referral system technology.

Reentry Roundtable leadership will integrate these funding needs into future budgets and will explore opportunities for more support for projects led by RAP in collaboration with Reentry Roundtable.

Table 1: Reentry Roundtable Strategic Plan Alignment with RAP Implementation Plan

RAP Goal	Reentry Roundtable Goal	Key Aligned Strategies from 2022-26 Strategic Plan
<p>PEER SUPPORT & COMMUNITY SPACE: RAP's monthly meetings will be guided by a peer-support model structure each month and are open to participants at any point in their reentry journey</p>	<p>PEER NETWORK: Anyone released from jail or prison has access to a robust peer support network</p> <p>GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE: Redesign Roundtable governance structure to improve leadership accountability, clarify expectations, and create a pipeline of leaders with lived experience in decision-making roles</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Convene organizations that train and host justice-involved reentry peer specialists to develop a strategy for increased capacity and funding - Develop options for potential growth, expansion, and funding of the Reentry Advocacy Project (RAP) network and create an implementation plan, including building community both for persons who are justice system impacted and for their families/allies - Revise Roundtable bylaws to accommodate a more inclusive vision of the Roundtable as a network of reentry leaders that anyone can participate in - Develop and/or refine current financial policies including annual budgeting - Introduce intentional network weavers and Roundtable ambassadors to foster new connections and deepen relationships across networks, including local faith communities, criminal justice reform organizers, area academic institutions, and coalitions addressing intersecting issue areas
<p>ADVOCACY LEADERSHIP PIPELINE: The Reentry Advocacy Fellow will focus on developing relationships and facilitating networking opportunities between RAP and Reentry organizations.</p>	<p>LEADERSHIP & CAREER DEVELOPMENT: Increase opportunities for professional skillbuilding and mentorship for persons with justice system involvement</p> <p>ADVOCACY: Encourage local civic and community leaders to take action to reduce the negative impacts of unsuccessful reentry on the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support the development of a regional leadership cohort of persons with justice system involvement and/or support the increased participation of persons with justice system involvement in existing regional leadership programs - Maintain and strengthen the Advocacy Fellowship & Mentor Program - Develop a community-wide advocacy agenda to raise awareness of the collateral consequences of incarceration and the importance of successful reentry to addressing other community challenges including homelessness, mental health and substance use, food insecurity, and family reunification - Revise Roundtable bylaws to accommodate a more inclusive vision of the Roundtable as a network of reentry leaders that anyone can participate in - Develop and/or refine current financial policies including annual budgeting

	<p>GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE: Redesign Roundtable governance structure to improve leadership accountability, clarify expectations, and create a pipeline of leaders with lived experience in decision-making roles</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduce intentional network weavers and Roundtable ambassadors to foster new connections and deepen relationships across networks, including local faith communities, criminal justice reform organizers, area academic institutions, and coalitions addressing intersecting issue areas
<p>RESOURCE BANK: RAP will serve as an open line to connect people who are impacted by the criminal legal systems to resources and reentry service provider networks</p>	<p>CAPACITY BUILDING: Provide technical assistance to support the expansion and improvement of local reentry services</p> <p>GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE: Redesign Roundtable governance structure to improve leadership accountability, clarify expectations, and create a pipeline of leaders with lived experience in decision-making roles</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Convene a reentry community of practice and potential sub-areas of practice (e.g. workforce development, housing, health) - Facilitate and support the development of a closed loop referral system for reentry services - Develop capacity building framework for emerging reentry leaders and organizations in partnership with RAP - Revise Roundtable bylaws to accommodate a more inclusive vision of the Roundtable as a network of reentry leaders that anyone can participate in - Develop and/or refine current financial policies including annual budgeting - Introduce intentional network weavers and Roundtable ambassadors to foster new connections and deepen relationships across networks, including local faith communities, criminal justice reform organizers, area academic institutions, and coalitions addressing intersecting issue areas

Reentry Advocacy Project Visioning & Implementation Plan

April 2023



Amanda Cassidy - Trejo
Reentry Advocacy Fellow

From Amanda



Over the past six months, I have had the opportunity to learn more about the history of the Reentry Advocacy Project (RAP) and exactly how far it has come since its inception in 2012 as the Ex-Offenders Council. None of the work could have been accomplished without the folks who had the idea to form this group. I give all my thanks to Jorge Renaud, Darwin Hamilton, Lauren Johnson, Annette Price, Laurie Pherigo, and the many advocates and leaders who made this all possible. Without your hard work and dedication, none of this would be possible.

SUPPORT. ADVISE. ADVOCATE.

To the Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable and Woollard Nichols Torres Consulting team, your support of our community has not gone unnoticed. Thank you for your continued efforts, diligence and for amplifying our voices.



Background

In the summer of 2022, the Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable spent time building out its [strategic plan](#) for 2022-2026. During this process, five strategic goals were developed. One of these goals is to develop a robust peer support network that anyone being released from jail or prison would be able to access. A strategy of this goal is to develop options for potential growth, expansion, and funding of the Reentry Advocacy Project (RAP) network and create an implementation plan, building a community both for people who are impacted by the criminal legal systems and for their families or allies.

The Reentry Advocacy Project began as the Ex-Offenders Council in 2012 with the purpose to change hearts and minds by sharing members' stories of their own lived experiences in the criminal legal system.

As the Ex-Offenders Council evolved into the Reentry Advocacy Project, participation expanded to include family members, allies, and people with their own lived experience in the criminal legal system. Members of the RAP body played a pivotal role in assisting with passing the Austin City Ordinance for Fair Chance Hiring in 2016.

As RAP has continued to grow and change, its members have gone on to become leaders in their own advocacy. Some members now lead nonprofit organizations, work for nationally recognized agencies, and continue to be part of shaping public policy and mentoring those who return to our communities. RAP has been the launching pad for many of its member's careers. It remains a space for guidance resources and supports no matter where someone is in the reentry journey.

RAP Visioning Process

Beginning in the fall of 2022, Amanda Cassidy - Trejo (Reentry Advocacy Fellow) began working with Darwin Hamilton (Advocacy Fellowship Mentor) Cynthia Simons (RAP Representative) Melissa Shearer (Vice Chair), and Madeleine Jordan-Lord & Kelly Nichols (Woollard Nichols Torres Consulting) to build out a visioning process for the future of RAP. For the next 3 months, we had conversations with the RAP community. We collected feedback in our monthly meetings and circulated a survey to the broader community. Throughout this process, we heard three major areas of strengths: Peer Support & Community Space, Advocacy Leadership Pipeline, and a Resource Bank; as well as opportunities to continue the growth of RAP. In addition, we developed key agreements to maintain the integrity of our monthly meetings as well as the community.

What We Mean When We Say... (Definitions)

Mission: For us a mission means our focus and what we are working to accomplish.

Vision: For us this means how we see the future and how we believe accomplishing our mission will look.

Impact: For us this means how we work to accomplish our mission.

Serving: For us this means who we serve, who we work for and with.

People that are impacted by the criminal legal systems: For us this means the more than 9 million Texans who have been touched by the criminal legal system in some capacity. Our primary focus is within the Travis County/Austin area but we invite any Texan to join and share space with us.

Why we say “Criminal Legal System” not “Criminal Justice System”:

“Throughout history and across the world, false language has facilitated the systemic, inhumane treatment of groups of people. This is certainly the case for people impacted by the U.S. criminal legal system. Words shape how people think, and our speech should recognize that our system of racially biased policing and draconian punishment is not just.”

~Erica Bryant, Vera Institute of Justice, Dec 2021

Our Identity Statement

RAP works to advance our **mission** by providing community and resources for people who are impacted by the **criminal legal** systems and we advocate for policies and practices that directly and positively **impact** our community. Our **vision** is that people impacted by the criminal legal system will have the knowledge and tools to access opportunities, services, and support to achieve their own goals. We work to **impact** relationships, organizations, policies, and cultural assumptions about people returning to our community and their families by serving those who are impacted by the **criminal legal** systems, their friends, families, and allies.

Our main areas of focus are...

- **PEER SUPPORT & COMMUNITY SPACE**
- **ADVOCACY LEADERSHIP PIPELINE**
- **RESOURCE BANK**

Group Agreements

We commit to creating a space where...

- every voice is equal.
- we agree to disagree.
- we will be aware and mindful of other people's experiences and be compassionate.
- we commit to preserving the safety of this space.
- challenge the ideal/belief not the person, it's not a personal attack.
- we listen to one another and treat each other with respect.
- we speak for ourselves, not your group.
- we respect confidentiality.
- when sharing our individual stories, we are mindful of other people's triggers.
- we use "I" statements.
- if we need to speak of someone who is not present, refrain from using their name.
- we share our own story, not someone else's.
- we hold space for other people, "Step up and step back".
- if there is an issue within the group, name it.

In this space, we will not...

- We will not engage in personal attacks i.e., name-calling, profanity, intentionally interrupting others, and shutting people down.
- We will not use someone's story as a weapon.
- We will not lie or intentionally deceive.
- We will not intentionally manipulate others for personal gain.
- We will not intentionally trigger someone.
- We will not disrespect one another's race or gender.

Goals

To accomplish our mission, our goals will be:

- **PEER SUPPORT & COMMUNITY SPACE**
 - RAP's monthly meetings will be guided by a peer-support model structure each month and are open to participants at any point in their reentry journey

- **ADVOCACY LEADERSHIP PIPELINE**
 - The Reentry Advocacy Fellow will focus on developing relationships and facilitating networking opportunities between RAP and Reentry organizations.

- **RESOURCE BANK**
 - RAP will serve as an open line to connect people who are impacted by the criminal legal systems to resources and reentry service provider networks

Some ways we can accomplish these goals are outlined in the strategies below:

PEER SUPPORT & COMMUNITY SPACE

Timing: Create a meeting structure around preferences and availability of members. Develop meeting content that is inclusive of participants' goals. Maintain a consistent time and structure for RAP to continue its longevity.

Outreach: Diversify outreach strategy with increased and consistent reminders on email, social media, and word of mouth. Partner with organizations with dedicated reentry spaces to share RAP announcements and invite new participants.

Facilitation: Utilize a peer support group facilitation model with topics chosen by group members.

Strategies continued

ADVOCACY LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

Advocate: Share Advocacy opportunities on RAP social media and mailing lists. Create formal partnerships with Roundtable partners to develop internships focused on advocacy priorities.

Partnership: Nurture relationships with community organizations such as Grassroots Leadership, Lioness & Statewide Leadership Council to work together on aligning opportunities such as advocacy training or mentorship experiences.

Leadership: Solidify RAP's role as many people's starting point with reentry advocacy work. Create a leadership pipeline or career ladder to other opportunities such as internship partnerships or employment pipelines for past fellows and other RAP participants. Integrate with Reentry Roundtable Leadership Cohort or scholarship program.

RESOURCE BANK

Events: Coordinate with RAP members to plan and execute two events a year to provide reentry services to the community with the focus being on housing and basic needs.

Connect: Allow space in each monthly meeting for members to share resources or request resources. The Fellow will develop a list of reliable resources to assist in their navigation of them and to connect with those who reach out via email or social media.

Network: Participate in Reentry Services Community of Practice and BHCJAC Intercept 4 Workgroup. Connect RAP members to reentry services network.

How Will We Measure Success

PEER SUPPORT & COMMUNITY SPACE

- Increased and sustained participation.
- Increased awareness in the community of RAP's role in the reentry ecosystem.
- RAP members are leaders in co-creating events & meetings.
- The overall community has trust and reliance on RAP community members.
- The RAP space is inclusive and supports all who join us regardless of who they are or where they are in their reentry journey.
- RAP connects and builds with similar community support groups and provides guidance and feedback in order to replicate RAP in other geographic areas.
- RAP community members will have fostered relationships that have created funding streams either privately or via grant opportunities.

ADVOCACY LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

- Uplift success stories from RAP community members, for example, Annette Price and Lauren Johnson's careers in advocacy.
- Strengthen and build mentorship roles or buddy systems so that each mentee becomes the mentor and so on.

RESOURCE BANK

- Members will be able to attend meetings and express their needs and goals and feel supported in meeting them.
- RAP members have connected with referred partners and have found success in this connection.

Potential Partners

We brainstormed some potential partnerships based on our goals and strategies as well as the community feedback.

PEER SUPPORT & COMMUNITY SPACE

Via Hope
RARE Reentry
Grassroots Leadership
ECHO
Communities For Recovery

ADVOCACY LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

Statewide Leadership Council
Texas Appleseed
Travis County Public Defender's Office
Lioness

RESOURCE BANK

Referral networks

Aunt Bertha
UniteUS
Honest Jobs
Workforce Solutions Capital Area
Austin Free-Net

Reentry Service Hubs

Building Promise USA
RARE Reentry

Reentry Roundtable network

Planning Council members such as Indeed, Goodwill, Downtown Austin Community Court, etc.

Emphasis on Recovery and Mental Health Support

RecoveryATX
Texas Harm Reduction Alliance
Communities for Recovery
Integral Care
Central Health
Clean Investments Inc

Recommendations For 2023 Fellow

- To enroll in Via Hope's Reentry Peer Support training program
- Connect with Planning Council members and learn about policy priorities to find alignment with advocacy interests.
- Meet with previous fellows & RAP participants who have furthered their careers due to RAP participation to understand paths to sustainability in advocacy choices.
- Design and implement Bi-Annual events for the RAP community. For example Resource fairs or Advocacy Mixers, etc.
- Apply for Leadership Austin - Emerge program.
- RAP Goals should remain aligned with Reentry Roundtable strategic plan and increase capacity for both groups and support as needed.
- Follow current opportunities such as the Travis County Diversion Center, and build alignment with County to support the Peer Support goal.
- Engage with emerging reentry opportunities, such as Travis County Diversion Center involvement. Continue to build alignment with Travis County and the City of Austin initiatives.