FOCUS AREA: Reducing Recidivism with Employment

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, and with over two million Americans currently incarcerated, the United States accounts for roughly one-quarter of the world’s incarcerated population. The financial cost of incarceration to society is roughly $180 billion annually after factoring in judicial, legal, and policing costs. The social cost is also of concern as the incarceration rate is substantially higher for Americans of color. One of the major contributors to these staggering numbers is recidivism. Fifty percent of individuals return to prisons or jails within a few years of their release, and the racial discrepancies concerning incarceration and recidivism make addressing recidivism an even greater public priority.

State and local agencies and their strategic partners need timely information and evidence to effectively employ interventions intended to reduce recidivism rates and help individuals succeed in the labor market after their release. Thanks to the Applied Data Analytics program, several state teams worked together to obtain meaningful insights on post-incarceration employment experiences and the impact of recidivism reduction efforts by linking corrections and workforce data. Using data from one state, the teams generated novel project ideas and initiated a new research practice of cumulative learning with the potential to expand nationally.

Examples of questions they posed to the data include:

- What are the most common employment patterns of prisoners following their release?
- How does employment, wage levels, gang involvement, substance abuse, educational attainment, or children’s presence affect the likelihood of recidivism?
- How do prison programs that support or address educational attainment, social skills, and therapy affect the likelihood of recidivism?
- How do predictive tools identify individuals more likely to recidivate, and how can we use this information to help design programs that will provide enhanced support to these individuals?

THE FUTURE IS NOW for states to generate ideas and products focused on reducing recidivism rates. Consider the opportunities provided by the Coleridge Initiative’s Applied Data Analytics program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: coleridgeinitiative.org/training/
How did the Applied Data Analytics training program help?

1. **Trained State Agency Staff**
   The Coleridge Initiative’s Applied Data Analytics program provided participants with **hands-on training in modern data analytics**. The curriculum covered data management, data analysis, machine learning, inference, privacy protection, and the ethical use of data. Participants used real-world data focused on a just-in-time policy concern: reducing recidivism. State teams included both technical and program staff, which helped bridge knowledge gaps across disciplines and strengthened relationships.

2. **Enabled States to Create New Products**
   The Applied Data Analytics classes are an “innovation sandbox.” Participants explored ideas and analytical techniques with colleagues from within their state as well as colleagues from across the country. This rich network of individuals and teams generated new research ideas with a common research focus.

3. **Provided a Secure Place for States to Share Data**
   The Coleridge Initiative’s Administrative Data Research Facility (ADRF) enabled state agencies to **share real-world data securely and safely**. During training, state agency staff learned how this federally-certified, secure platform applies a “five safes” framework – safe project, safe people, safe settings, safe data and safe output – to ensure data are protected.

“Cross state administrative data from the Coleridge training provided timely and relevant information for employers in the Midwest, allowing us to make a case for recruiting new firms to hire in the state.”
- State Economic Development Official, November 2020

Over 500 people from more than 100 state agencies successfully completed an Applied Data Analytics program over the past three years. Together they initiated over 100 exploratory research projects focusing on critical policy concerns.

“Our data is the greatest untapped resource for improving public policy outcomes.”
- State Workforce Director, August 2020

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