



RESOLVE
PHILADELPHIA

The
REENTRY
PROJECT

May 2019

Photograph by: Kriston Bethel

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, we want to thank The Reentry Project's reporting partners, who carried out the impressive journalistic work that grounded this initiative:

Generocity

Billy Penn

NextCity

The Philadelphia Public School Notebook

The Philadelphia Citizen

The Philadelphia Inquirer

PhillyCAM

El Sol

WHYY

WURD

El Zol

Muhlenburg College

Temple University Klein College of Media and Communications

We owe special thanks to the following individuals at these news organizations for their time, energy and dedication to the project:

Michelle Bjork

Gene Sonn

Emma Restrepo

Sara Lomax Reese

Gretjen Clausing

Laura Deutch

Julie Zeglen

Ariella Cohen

Maria Archangelo

Roxanne Shepelavy

Aggie Ebrahimi Bazaz

Sara Vigneri

Jim MacMillan

Chris Krewson

Shannon Wink

Fernando Mendez

Sabrina Vourvoulias

Jane Von Bergen

David Boardman

Julie Christie

We'd like to thank the community organizations that partnered on Reentry Project reporting and events, including:

The Center for Returning Citizens

Frontline Dads

The Reentry Think Tank

YSRP

Code For Philly

Finally, Resolve Philadelphia would like to express deep gratitude to Lauren Parker for her time, energy, and expertise in planning and carrying out the research for this report, in addition to executing its preparation.

Introduction & Executive Summary



Photograph by: Kriston Bethel

After years of diminishing resources and changing patterns of media consumption, newsrooms across the nation are faced with finding new ways to produce high-quality coverage that informs the public and generates enough revenue to remain sustainable. In response, newsrooms have had to reorganize their workforce, shift to digital platforms, seek out new revenue streams, contend with social media, and experiment with new methods of engagement—some outlets even wading into the waters of “virtual reality journalism”¹.

One promising model to face these new realities is collaborative journalism. While some point to the earliest journalistic collaboration as the formation of the Associated Press in 1846, a new strain of journalism collaboratives have formed since the early 2000s that entail a higher level of intention, duration and organizational commitment than most of those previously seen².

The Reentry Project was an unprecedented journalism collaborative engaging 15 Philadelphia newsrooms and organizations. The project dedicated over a year to covering the topic of reentry by lifting up the challenges faced by returning citizens, offering promising solutions to these challenges, and coordinating thoughtful community events.

While the fact that newsrooms were collaborating was not novel in Philadelphia (as it had been attempted in the past with the Next Mayor Initiative of 2015 and less formally amongst individual reporters) the Reentry Project brought collaboration and engagement to a higher level engaging ethnic media, community media, reentry leaders, non-profits, academic institutions, traditional news outlets, and city partners.

¹Pew Research Center (2016). State of the News Media 2016. Accessed at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2016/06/state-of-the-news-media-report-2016-final.pdf>

²Stonbely, S. (2017). Comparing models of collaborative journalism. Center for Cooperative Media, The School of Communication and Media at Montclair State University. Accessed at: <https://collaborativejournalism.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Models-for-Collaborative-Journalism-research-paper.pdf>



This white paper provides an assessment of the impact of the Reentry Project. Teasing out the impact of media is a commonly wrestled with challenge, only made more difficult when the impact is dispersed amongst more than a dozen partners as with the Reentry Project. As such, this assessment is not a quantitative analysis to conclusively prove that the Reentry Project “caused” one change or another. Instead, it is an in-depth, qualitative look into the significant individual, group and institutional transformations inspired by The Reentry Project, as offered by those involved in or having some interaction with the collaborative.

The impacts of the Reentry Project can be loosely categorized as “tangible” and “intangible.” Tangible impacts: In following up with participants, it was clear that participation in the project or attendance in events had inspired a few organizations to reconsider their hiring practices, some stories had encouraged institutions to change their practices even if only temporarily, and partners leveraged partnerships and lessons learned in the collaborative to start new projects. Intangible impacts are as follows:

1. The extensive collaboration deepened relationships, allowed for the sharing of resources and expanded the reach of media partners,
2. This collaboration helped spread solutions journalism across partners of the collective, and in turn, this focus on solutions allowed for more in-depth and humanizing reporting,
3. The solutions focus and community engagement encouraged partners to respect and elevate the lived experience of formerly incarcerated people, seeing them as leaders and experts in the work,
4. The collaborative of stories that were new in format, depth, and language,
5. With more support for creative storytelling and deeper engagement, journalists got a closer and more personal view of incarceration and the multidimensional lives of people reintegrating society, transforming their frame of reference in the process, and
6. All of these components led to the amplification of the issue of reentry during a unique political moment in Philadelphia.

³Gross, L. (2018). *The Reentry Project: A Collaborative Playbook*. Solutions Journalism Network.

TIMELINE OF THE REENTRY PROJECT

Stories published

9 stories

- **Jan 2016** - Project imagined by Jane Von Bergen & Jean Friedman-Rudovsky.
- **Spring 2016** - Initial eight partners gather to form planning committee.
- **June 2016** - Solutions Journalism Network funding support; first General Strategic Meeting.
- **Aug 2016** - Additional partners join the collaborative.
- **Sept 2016** - Hire initial Project Editor.
- **Oct 2016** - Knight Foundation funding support.
- **Nov 2016** - Official project launch. Website launch. Training for partners in solutions journalism.
- **Jan 2017** - Second General Strategic Meeting.
- **Feb 2017** - Transfer Project Editor role to Jean Friedman-Rudovsky.
- **Mar 2017** - Third General Strategic Meeting.
- **Apr 2017** - Finalize name and logo. Launch sub-site on Philly.com. SJN highlights the Reentry Project at Montclair University's Collaborative Summit.
- **May 2017** - Event and storybooths: "If These Walls Could Talk: Solving Reentry & Recidivism" (WURD with PMN, WHYY, PhillyCAM).
- **June 2017** - Participate in event: "Beyond the Walls: Prison Healthcare and Reentry Summit" (media partners led 3 panels). City Hall art exhibit as part of June is Reentry Month. Emma Restrepo of El Zol Radio leads focus group at Graterford prison. Launch call-in story line. June Reentry Film Festival.
- **Sept 2017** - Lenfest Foundation funding support for a second year of the collaborative solutions approach, to begin in 2018.
- **Oct 2017** - PowerUp Reentry: Digital Solutions Day Hack-a-Thon. Mayor issues press release on hack-a-thon.
- **Nov 2017** - Event: "Reentry: Hiring from Untapped Pool" at Chamber of Commerce (PMN)
Event: "The Reentry Blueprint: Stories and Solutions from the Formerly Incarcerated".
- **Dec 2017** - Official end of the Reentry Project.
- **Jan 2018** - Start of Resolve Philadelphia. Media partners hold Strategic Planning session to decide on topic of second year of collaborative work - choose poverty and economic justice.
- **Mar 2018** - Final reporting completed for the Reentry Project.

MAJOR OUTPUTS & ENGAGEMENT METRICS

- Engaged 15 media outlets in collaborative, solutions-based journalism and reporting on reentry for over a year.
- Produced 190 stories and broadcasts on a topic once relegated to the margins by most media outlets.
- Received Philly News Award for “Best Non-Traditional News Provider of the Year” for 2017.
- Received the Associated Press Media Editors’ Award for Community Engagement for 2018.
- Secured a total of \$240,000 in funding, \$70,000 of which was made available for a fund administered by partners to support reporting and engagement projects.
- The Reentry Project is the subject of at least two academic papers, five requests to participate in professional panels and conferences.
- Co-produced or participated in six community events:
 1. “If These Walls Could Talk: Solving Reentry & Recidivism,” co-produced by four media outlets, includes storytelling booths.
 2. (participation only) “Beyond the Walls: Prison Healthcare and Reentry Summit,” Reentry Project partners lead 3 panels and live broadcast.
 3. “PowerUp Reentry: Digital Solutions to Reentry,” Philadelphia’s first ever hack-a-thon on reentry.
 4. First journalism focus group in Graterford Prison.
 5. “Reentry: Hiring from an Untapped Pool” event for employers on the benefits and challenges of hiring formerly incarcerated employees.
 6. Culminating event, “The Reentry Blueprint: Stories and Solutions from the Formerly Incarcerated” was attended by 300 people, the Mayor and other officials, widely praised by audience and community for the event’s novel approach and execution.
- Five “What Works” articles on national best practices on reentry.
- One Life After Incarceration infographic explainer.
- Four first-person short videos about reentry experiences.
- “Share Your Story” call-in line received more than 50 calls and conversations.
- Inclusion in the City Hall Reentry arts exhibit.
- Ten Klein College of Media and Communication students engaged as interns.
- Financed two short films (still in production)
- Engagement metrics⁴:
 1. 1,547 newsletter subscribers
 2. 1,076 Twitter followers
 3. 488 Facebook followers (reaching up to 900 users at peak)
 4. 322 posts published on theReentryProject.org
 5. 28,307 total page views on theReentryProject.org
 6. Over 8,000 monthly views of the website during peak



Courtesy of Tom Gralish and the Philadelphia Daily News

⁴Source: Gross, L. (2018). The Reentry Project: A Collaborative Playbook. Solutions Journalism Network.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY & FRAMEWORK

This assessment relies on qualitative methods to understand what participants and some external actors viewed as the most important impacts of the Reentry Project. A qualitative approach was chosen for several reasons. First, quantitative metrics on reach and social media traffic have already been presented in existing documents, such as the Collaborative Playbook⁵. These types of metrics are commonly collected in newsrooms across the country; however, their usefulness can be somewhat limited⁶. For example, page views on a website may tell you how many “eyes” have been on an article, but readers may open an article and not actually read it, and page views don’t give a sense on the effect an article may have had on the awareness, behavior or attitudes of a reader.

There is the outstanding question on what effect the Reentry Project had on the public. This is an important question that could be explored with surveying techniques, for example, but was not the goal here for a few reasons. First, at the time of starting this impact assessment, the Reentry Project had been complete for over a year. The Reentry Project was formalized into Resolve Philadelphia, which started Broke in Philly as its new project focusing on economic mobility and poverty. Given the significant length of time since the Reentry Project had ended, plus the fact that another media collective had grown in its place, there was enough reason to believe that it would be too difficult to tease out the impacts of the Reentry Project from the current impacts of Broke in Philly in the mind of the average reader. Moreover, there were insufficient resources to allocate to an intensive surveying project.

Instead, this assessment seeks to understand the real impacts the Reentry Project had on participants in the collective, their respective organizations, and even the larger landscape of journalism in Philadelphia. As conveyers of information, media representatives possess incredible power to influence the attitudes and behaviors of decision-makers and the general public. As such, it’s worth noting if or when media entities themselves experience a transformation that shifts their worldview or inspires them to do their work differently. These type of individual and group-level changes are what this assessment seeks to unpack.



Photograph by: Kriston Bethel

⁵Gross, L. (2018). The Reentry Project: A Collaborative Playbook. Solutions Journalism Network.

⁶Tofel, R. (2013). Non-profit journalism: Issues around Impact. A white paper of ProPublica. Accessed at: https://s3.amazonaws.com/propublica/assets/about/LFA_ProPublica-white-paper_2.1.pdf

IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY & FRAMEWORK

The assessment included 4 main parts:

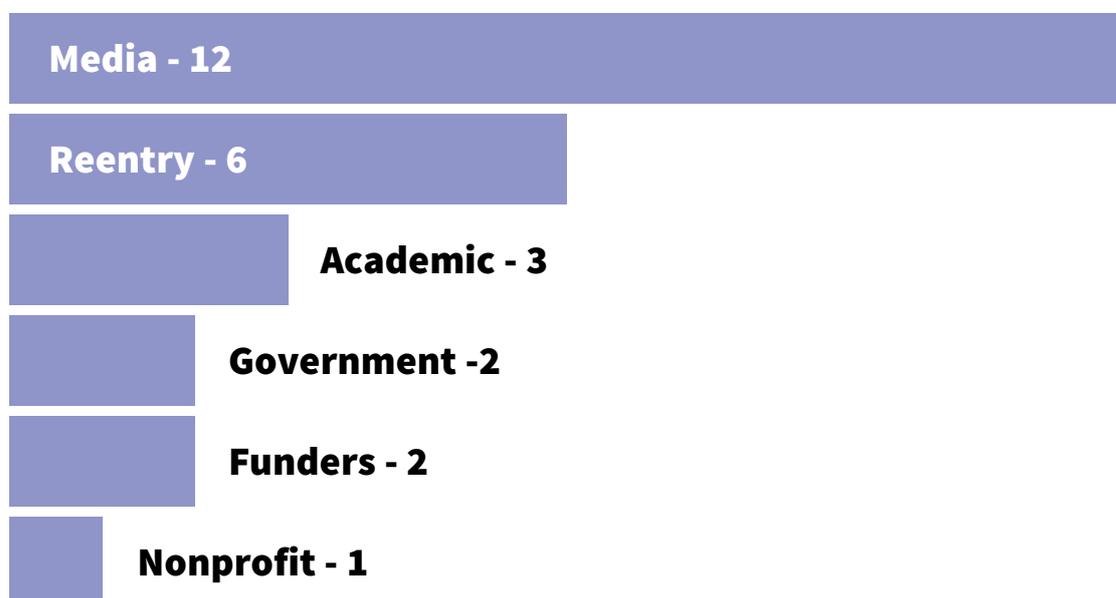
1. A review of background literature on media impact assessment, social impact and evaluation strategies and tools, and solutions journalism,
2. A review of original project documents, emails between participants (primarily involving the Project Editor), published articles and case studies pertaining to the Reentry Project,
3. Follow-up with individuals that indicated they wanted to change their program or work in response to the coverage or events of the Reentry Project,
4. 26 in-depth interviews with stakeholders from philanthropic, media, reentry, and academic organizations.

The interviews were 30 minutes to 1 hour in length. Typically interviews were with one respondent, though a few group interviews were conducted, where several members of one organization participated. A standardized interview protocol of 19-23 questions was devised in advance and formed the general basis of each interview. However, not every question was asked in each interview due to time constraints and relevance. Additional questions tailored to a person's unique involvement were added in some cases. A copy of this protocol can be found in Appendix A.

This assessment did not start with any pre-conceived themes to validate or deny. Instead, cross-cutting themes were noted as interviews progressed. By the end of all interviews, some smaller themes were grouped as sub-categories of larger themes to form the final list of six. Themes were considered if representatives from at least 3 distinct organizations raised them in interviews.

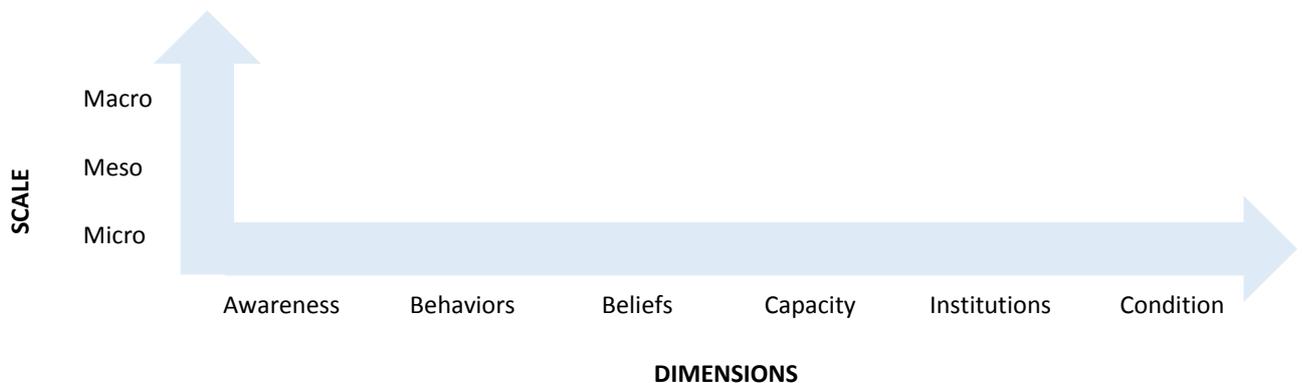
A framework for understanding the scale and dimensions of impact was also devised as part of this assessment. This framework is an amalgam of several existing impact frameworks from media outlets and social impact organizations.

Industries of interview respondents



Here, we define scale as micro (changes to individuals), meso (changes to groups), or macro (changes to structures), as originally defined by The Center for Investigative Reporting. We include the following dimensions of impact, as changes to: awareness or understanding, behaviors, beliefs or attitudes, capacity or access to resources, institutions and structures, the condition of people. These dimensions are adapted from those Animating Democracy's Continuum of Impact and Learning for Action's "funnel diagram" of impact.

Impact Framework



Photograph by: Kriston Bethel

⁷The Center for Investigative Reporting (2016). CIR's Impact Tracker: How to use it and why you need it. Accessed at: <https://www.revealnews.org/article/cirs-impact-tracker-how-to-use-it-and-why-you-need-it/>

⁸Animating Democracy (2017). Continuum of Impact: A guide to defining social and civic outcomes and indicators. Accessed at: <http://animatingdemocracy.org/continuum-impact-guide>.

⁹Learning for Action (2013): Deepening Engagement for Lasting Impact. Accessed at: <http://cmsimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Deepening-Engagement-for-Lasting-Impact-Resoucrs-reports.pdf>

IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY & FRAMEWORK

Part 1: Tangible Impacts. In reviewing original emails and documents of the Reentry Project and following up on the status of projects spurred by the Reentry Project, it was apparent that: participation in the project or attendance in events had inspired a few organizations to reconsider their hiring practices, some stories had encouraged institutions to change their practices even if only temporarily, and partners leveraged partnerships and lessons learned in the collaborative to start new projects. Here is a summary of these tangible impacts:

1. Technical.ly Philly develops a “returning citizen-friendly” icon for use on local job boards. They intend to build this out more in upcoming year. Christopher Wink, Co-Founder, CEO and Publisher of Technical.ly Philly mentions that their participation in the Reentry Project and the job board project encourages them to re-evaluate their own hiring practices: “How could you not look at what the criteria for returning citizen workplace is and not question whether you have that or not. We’ve removed some of that language from our job descriptions through time. As an organization ourselves in hiring, we’ve updated how we talk and hire. It runs through our newsroom understanding when we approach any issue. There’s a lot more understanding of those issues.” (Meso-scale change in behavior)
2. After attending the Chamber of Commerce event on “Reentry: Hiring from an Untapped Pool,” Ikea begins to re-evaluate its hiring practices. Their Talent Acquisition Program Specialist notes: “The panel last November was very helpful in our journey, and we very much appreciate the opportunity to have been in attendance. Over the past year, we have been making many changes, including the centralization of our recruitment team and processes involved in Talent Acquisition. This does include our approach to pre-employment screenings as well – we are continuing to adjust the ways we work with the justice-involved population!” (Meso-scale change in behavior)
3. Jim MacMillan, formerly of Temple University, sets out to start a new project on how communities facing gun violence are covered in the media. He states he intends to emulate this project on the model of the Reentry Project and Broke in Philly, incorporating the “secret sauce” of collaboration, community engagement and solutions journalism. He notes: “I’ve worked in all of those areas before but it helped for me to clarify my vision for the future of local community journalism.” (Micro-scale change in behavior)
4. The Reentry Think Tank and People’s Paper Co-op and co-applicants secured a grant from the Lenfest’s collaborative grant stream to start a Reentry Media Fellowship which would “train, fund, and support formerly incarcerated men and women in Philadelphia to be the city’s newest criminal justice system print, radio, and video journalists.” This work will build upon the partnerships of the Reentry Project. (Meso-scale change in capacity)
5. A WHYY article describes a program in a Camden County jail where incarcerated people train rescue dogs to be companion animals for veterans¹⁰. A representative with the Atlantic County system reads the story and expresses interest about creating a similar program. While the idea never gets off the ground, the representative notes: “The Reentry Project was instrumental in spurring my interest in this project. It is something I have continued interest in and I hope to pursue in the future.” (Micro-scale change in awareness)

¹⁰<https://whyy.org/articles/camden-county-inmates-train-rescue-dogs-as-companions-for-veterans-video/>



Courtesy of Tom Gralish and the Philadelphia Daily News

6. The Philadelphia Department of Prisons adds interpreters after reading Generocity's story¹¹ on how prisons do not provide adequate resources for deaf persons detained in their system. (Meso-scale change in behavior)
7. A Billy Penn story¹² prompted the temporary extension of a virtual visitation program that was scheduled to be shut down. (Meso-scale change in behavior)
8. Local hunger relief organization created "returning-citizen friendly" position, in part based on attending the Reentry Blueprint event. (Micro-scale change in behavior and capacity)
9. Emma Restrepo, formerly a radio host with El Zol Radio and currently with Dos Puntos, is working on a documentary to "prepare the Latino community for all lifers returning," building upon some of her work in the Reentry Project and more recently, with Broke in Philly. (Micro-scale change in behavior)

Part II: Intangible Impacts. In addition to these tangible impacts, the interviews revealed intangible impacts on the individuals and groups participating in the project, as well as the larger ecosystem of journalism in Philadelphia. Six cross cutting themes of impact emerged:

1. The extensive collaboration deepened relationships, allowed for the sharing of resources and expanded the reach of media partners,
2. This collaboration helped spread solutions journalism across partners of the collective, and in turn, this focus on solutions allowed for more in-depth and humanizing reporting,
3. The solutions focus and community engagement encouraged partners to respect and elevate the lived experience of formerly incarcerated people, seeing them as leaders and experts in the work,
4. The collaborative produced stories that were new in format, depth, and language,
5. With more support for creative storytelling and deeper engagement, journalists got a closer and more personal view of incarceration and the multidimensional lives of people reintegrating society, transforming their frame of reference in the process, and
6. All of these components led to the amplification of the issue of reentry during a unique political moment in Philadelphia.

¹¹<https://generocity.org/philly/2017/03/17/deaf-inmates-graterford/>

¹²<https://billypenn.com/2017/06/07/like-skype-for-prisons-how-tech-is-used-in-pa-for-virtual-inmate-visitation/>

The following sections describe each theme in more detail and include a sample of supporting quotes from the interviews.

1. Encouraged Extensive Collaboration that Built Trust, Shared Resources and Expanded Reach

Scale of Impact:	Micro		Meso		Macro	
Dimensions:	Awareness	Behavior	Belief	Capacity	Institutional	Condition



Courtesy of Tom Gralish and the Philadelphia Daily News

In the Reentry Project, journalists, editors, activists, reentry leaders and residents worked together to advance the narrative around reentry. This collaboration built trust in unprecedented or seemingly adversarial relationships and deepened existing connections. While collaboration was demanding work, often the payoff for newsrooms was an expanded reach, access to diverse approaches to storytelling, and coordinated coverage.

Meso-scale changes in capacity: Several partners mentioned that collaboration was actually resource efficient for their organizations, allowing them to produce a higher volume of content that was less redundant with that of other outlets, or that partnerships provided them access to resources like event spaces, equipment or new media platforms. These relationships expanded their network of organizations of trusted professionals.

“We got a lot more stories through collaborating than we could produce independently through our website - that’s a selling point. The collaboration takes extra effort but gives you an entree we were cross-posting live pieces, it made a big difference. We don’t have to spend our resources to do that, we could spend our time on other things. And there was coordination so we’re not all doing the same story.”

- Eugene Sonn, WHYY

“As resources for media have dwindled, we have the power to reach bigger audiences by coming together. You still want to be the first one to break a story, but on certain stories that you can come together on, you can provide readers with a bigger expanse of information.”

- Michelle Bjork, Philadelphia Daily News

“We’ve built trust and relationships with reporters focused on these issues, expanded that and are still working with them today.”

- Lauren Fine, Youth Sentencing & Reentry Project

“The great advantage of collaboration is its additive nature. When newsrooms bring different ideas, levels of access, cultural lenses and formats to an issue, the picture becomes more and more nuanced and comprehensive over time.”

- David Bornstein, Solutions Journalism Network

Micro- and meso-scale changes in behaviors and beliefs: Partners commented that the assumed culture of competition amongst newsrooms was largely mitigated as newsrooms successfully coproduced stories and events of the initiative. This collaboration allowed media professionals to learn from each other and inspired their relationships with the public to be more collaborative.

“If there’s anything the Reentry Project has taught me, it’s how to collaborate more. Whether sharing resources or working on a story. And to collaborate with the public and different organizations that focus on these topics.”

- Peak Johnson, formerly Billy Penn

“It’s as if the Reentry Project served as a little journalism school. Being in the room with people from all types of media, who have new ways of doing reporting ... has been a good reminder that there are many different ways of doing journalism.”

- Roxanne Shepelavy, the Philadelphia Citizen

“What it’s done for us is connected us to newsrooms in a way that we were not previously part of. We’re in a funny position - community media has to fight for place at table as legitimate journalism. It’s been really nice to literally sit at table and feel like there is more of a sense of collaboration and openness and understanding of our work with other media outlets.”

- Laura Deutsch, PhillyCAM

Meso-scale institutional change: With so many media organizations collaborating more intensively and for an extended period of time, several stakeholders noted that this produced a shift not only in behaviors of individual journalists, but in the larger Philadelphia landscape of journalism. The Reentry Project overcame a larger culture of competition to inspire a new way of working. The success of the project demonstrated to funders that it was possible to invest at the “ecosystems-level.” This collaboration led to the formalization of Resolve Philadelphia as a permanent coordinating body of subsequent media collaborative projects, such as Broke in Philly.

“It was an efficient and effective way to work with a broad group of organizations through a single point of contact... It’s a confirmation of the notion that funding at the ecosystem level could be actionable and effective... We thought this was one of, if not the best such collaboration we’ve seen.”

- Jim Friedlich, Lenfest Institute for Journalism

“The Reentry Project was the first time that there was a city-wide initiative to bring media partners together - it forces you to engage across media entities. That fosters a level of collegiality, partnership, instead of instinct to be competing and scrapping for stories. This was a whole different approach - all working to deepen understanding around complicated issue. There was philosophical alignment that allowed relationships to transcend normal.”

- Sara Lomax Reese, WURD

“It was a force multiplier. That movement has already been underway, but there had been some resistance. There were those that thought this conflicts with the old reporting paradigm, some people get stuck in their ways... it’s really changing journalism in the city. It’s no less than transformational.”

- Jim MacMillan, Temple University



Photograph by: Kriston Bethel

2. Spread Solutions Journalism Amongst Partners

Scale of Impact:	Micro		Meso		Macro	
Dimensions:	Awareness	Behavior	Belief	Capacity	Institutional	Condition

For some partners, the focus on solutions journalism was a new approach, aided by trainings and learning from experienced colleagues. For others already practicing solutions journalism, it was a primary reason for joining the collaborative. The solutions-focus led to more nuanced, humanizing storytelling that elevated the experience of those closest to the issue. For some, this type of storytelling was critical in energizing readers, generating hope and momentum, and even validating grassroots work.

Micro- and meso-scale changes in awareness and behavior: For media partners new to solutions journalism, the Reentry Project provided the opportunity to learn about and test out the approach with the support of fellow colleagues in the journalism community. While writing about solutions took effort and was not without challenges, partners commented on how it changed the way they do their work to the present day, even on an organizational level.

“It’s always challenging to write certain stories from solutions journalism perspective, because sometimes there’s no solutions. But the Reentry Project had workshops on how to do this. Instead of focusing on the bad things this person did, it was more about them as a person and positive things they were doing, and how other people in their situation can fall in their footsteps.”

- Peak Johnson, formerly Billy Penn

“What grew out of the solutions piece that’s had the lasting impact on how we do our work - one phrase I heard multiple times was ‘no story about us without us.’ The solutions aspect of it pushed us in this direction. So much of journalism tends to be analysts and experts at the expense of the people with the most experience. A real solutions focus means talking to people on the ground level.”

- Eugene Sonn, WHY

For mission-driven reentry organizations and media partners, solutions journalism was the entree to joining the collective, providing the needed philosophical alignment. These partners commented on how solutions journalism was closer to their understanding of the role of media as advocacy, to lift up the experiences of people who have a personal understanding of a given issue. Seeing this alignment, these organizations chose to change their behavior to engage with the Reentry Project and the various other dimensions that entailed (e.g., collaborating with media, covering reentry, supporting events).

“[The Reentry Project] fit squarely in my view of journalism, which is more in the vein of activism or solutions-journalism. I really believe that journalism is a way to advocate for people, tell stories that show people’s full humanity. Challenge stereotypes, status quo. Changing hearts and minds.”

- Sara Lomax-Reese, WURD

“We got involved in the Reentry Project because the Philadelphia Citizen does solutions-specific engagement. So we got involved because solutions journalism was part of this. We write about issues pertaining to cities, so reentry fit into that, but this wasn’t something we spent a lot of time focusing on before. Solutions was my entrée into this.”

- Roxanne Shepelavy, the Philadelphia Citizen

“I think even having the vocabulary [of solutions journalism] wasn’t something I knew or thought about. Introduced me to it – both collaborative and solutions-oriented. We’re a young organization, learning about media in all different ways. In non-profit there’s collaboration and a mission focus. Learning that journalists could take a similar approach was new and cool.”
 - Lauren Fine, Youth Sentencing & Reentry Project

“The entire point of the Reentry Think Tank is that we need to be changing stories about reentry to be able to change policies and stories. We see the way to get there as working with people closest to the issue and developing their media skills... and then sharing that with tens of thousands of people. There was synergy with the Reentry Project because they’re focused on solutions - aligned ethics and strategies.”
 - Mark Strandquist, People’s Paper Co-Op and Reentry Think Tank

“With anything it’s always a challenge to try find solutions so people don’t feel hopeless. . . People gravitate towards bigger ideas that give people empowerment and a move towards action... The biggest value of solutions-based journalism is it gives visibility and voice to people laboring on the ground who don’t often get heard. That includes the voices of people most directly impacted.”
 - Councilmember Helen Gym, Philadelphia City Council

3. Elevated the Expertise of Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

Scale of Impact:	Micro		Meso	Macro		
Dimensions:	Awareness	Behavior	Belief	Capacity	Institutional	Condition

The framing of both the coverage and public events of the Reentry Project was different, by viewing those with the experience of incarceration as experts on reentry, raising their profile and in some cases, opening doors to opportunities. As noted in previous and following sections, media partners changed their practices to apply this frame to their reporting, as well as in how they built relationships with sources and how they approached community engagement. Grassroots activists in the reentry space noticed and welcomed this change, with some mentioning how it validated their own organizing efforts.

Micro-scale changes in capacity: Several noted that the culminating event, “The Reentry Blueprint: Stories and Solutions from the Formerly Incarcerated,” was a meaningful and powerful experience. The event was co-produced from start to finish with reentry leaders at The Center for Returning Citizens and Frontline Dads and featured TED-style talks by formerly incarcerated people on effective models for reintegrating into society. Rather than being asked to “validate the work of other people,” as one interviewee mentioned was the norm, the event was led by and showcased the ideas of those who personally experienced the challenges of reentry.

Participation in capstone Reentry Blueprint event elevated the visibility of several reentry leaders who later achieved prominent positions as national organizers, CEOs and Executive Directors, fellows and consultants on criminal justice reform. The event was also inspiring for attendees, with guests mentioning it felt “unusually meaningful” to hear from people directly impacted by incarceration. Glenn Bergman, Executive Director of the area’s largest food bank, noted that the event inspired him to work with his Human Resources Director to create a position for a person with a criminal background.

“It was meaningful in a lot of ways. It was a packed house, with everyone from politicians to financiers to people from the DOC, both state and county... They came to hear directly impacted people share their ideas around reentry. I think it created opportunity for people – one gentleman, it just catapulted his career. He’s been flying high ever since both as a speaker and as a leader in reentry and criminal justice reform. There’s another gentleman who’s now working with Cut 50 who was speaking and able to leverage his expertise that way. One person is now CEO and President of a major national organization fighting for criminal justice reform.”

- Reuben Jones, Frontline Dads

“I came back from the meeting at the Franklin Institute and said ‘we need to do more about hiring people who are reentering.’ We’re starting reentry program with CareerLink, it’s a warehouse job open to a candidate who is reentering. The idea came out of my participation in Blueprint, from [our Human Resources Director’s] own past experience with second-chance employers, and our experience with PCK (Philadelphia Community Kitchen).”

- Glenn Bergman, Philabundance

“The problem in the city of Philadelphia is that reentry and criminal justice is not being led by those most impacted. Our voices are not being honored and respected. So what I have to really applaud the Reentry Project for, was recognizing and amplifying our voices. Recognizing that we were taking leadership roles so we could put forth what was most important to us. That was critical and the most important part of the Reentry Project. When I look back over the course of the year, there were a lot of articles that gave us a voice and let our views be heard, which was not normal. But it should be.”

- Jondhi Harrell, The Center for Returning Citizens

“The Mayor and city stakeholders were there, so meant a lot to fellows as their expertise was being named and supported and amplified. They were being highlighted as expert theorists in efforts to reform these systems. Amazing way to structure the event.”

- Mark Strandquist, People’s Paper Co-op

Micro-scale changes in awareness and behavior: The media coverage also prioritized the lived experience of returning citizens, providing storytelling that was more humanizing and multi-dimensional as is noted in more detail in the next section. Several respondents appreciated this frame, noting that it allowed them to learn about reentry issues and changed their approach to reporting. In one case, after reading WHYY’s in-depth documentary on one woman’s struggle with reentry¹³, a person who was incarcerated with the woman wrote to WHYY. She noted that the story was well written, and that she was “grateful you left nothing out. It was perfect... I appreciate your authenticity.”¹⁴

“Over the years, slowly our voices are being listened to. Before we were always invited to validate the work of other people. Yet we were not invited to granting meetings, or decisions involving money, or decisions impacting our lives. The importance of the Reentry Project was it began to elevate the work of formerly incarcerated people in Philadelphia to the point where we have more of a voice in decision making.”

- Jondhi Harrell, The Center for Returning Citizens

“The Reentry Project validated things that people were organizing for for years... It’s important when that work is being lifted up as a possible solution. There are subtle and tangible ways that it supports the work.”

- Mark Strandquist, People’s Paper Co-op and Reentry Think Tank

“The Reentry Project and Broke in Philly did something that’s brave ..., which is they decided that covering issues with the perspective that the voices of extraordinarily poor and marginalized people was important. ... It’s extremely important ... that the voices of those who need journalism the most are paramount in conversations and articles about policy or how politics impact them – that’s huge.”

- Hannah Jane Sassaman, Media Mobilizing Project

¹³<https://whyy.org/segments/redinas-story-mothers-troubled-journey-home-prison/>

¹⁴Email correspondence from 11/29/2017 provided by Jean Friedman-Rudovsky on 10/26/2018.

4. Produced Novel Storytelling in Format, Frame and Language

Scale of Impact:	Micro		Meso		Macro	
Dimensions:	Awareness	Behavior	Belief	Capacity	Institutional	Condition

The Reentry Project led to stories that wouldn't have happened otherwise. These stories were new in several respects: reentry was a topic some outlets had not previously covered, the project allowed for longer form, in-depth features, the format encouraged multi-media storytelling as narratives were often paired with video or audio, many newsrooms made an effort to use language preferred by those in the reentry community, and stories were told in a more nuanced, humanizing manner. For smaller outlets, the small set of micro-grants allocated as part of the Reentry Project was crucial in making this new type of coverage possible.

Micro-scale and meso-scale changes in awareness, behaviors, beliefs and capacity: Partners offered that the shift in language and focus on more nuanced storytelling deepened their empathy towards returning citizens, expanded their awareness of the issue and led to, in their opinion, better work. Members from at least two outlets mentioned that the small grants boosted their capacity to do more indepth coverage or allocate staff to the topic of reentry. Several partners mentioned that their participation in the Reentry Project encouraged them to cover a topic that was not on their radar previously.

"Because there was funding available - we could send a reporter to travel for a story or we could bring an illustrator to a prison with me. It got me thinking about more creative ways for storytelling than we typically do."

- Julie Zeglen, Generocity

"It made me more aware of how those issues relate to so many other issues. Before the project, [we would report on how] some person in City Council released legislations. The Reentry Project allowed us to put reentry in other context of racism, poverty, in more meaningful ways instead of reacting."

- Shannon Wink, formerly Billy Penn

"We did better reporting as an organization. . . It had both of our newsrooms certainly sharing about stories in a way that we not always did. It deepened our coverage and understanding on the topic."

- Chris Wink, Technical.ly Philly

The collaborative also spent some time internally discussing how to shift their language to use words that were preferred by formerly incarcerated people and those in the reentry community. For example, "returning citizen" was encouraged over "ex-con." While these language changes weren't universally adopted by all partners and there was no formal style guide, some entities did make the change, with members expressing appreciation.

"This group talks about language more - like using 'returning citizen.' That language was new to some of our members and was important. Starting to shift how then we think about reintegrating people who were incarcerated. For our stories, people learned more about what resources are available, and what are the personal struggles that people face. On individual level that was definitely impactful."

- Laura Deutsch, PhillyCAM

5. Deepened the Understanding and Empathy of Journalists

Scale of Impact:	Micro		Meso	Macro		
Dimensions:	Awareness	Behavior	Belief	Capacity	Institutional	Condition

For journalists involved, it was a powerful and even transformative look into incarceration and reentry that has informed their frame of reference going forward.

Micro-scale changes in awareness, behavior and beliefs: Between the focus on solutions-journalism, the expanded capacity from sharing resources, the micro-grants, and the priority of elevating experiences of those directly impacted by incarceration, the structure of the Reentry Project allowed journalists to engage more deeply and for a longer period of time. This structure immersed them in the multi-dimensional lives of formerly incarcerated people, hearing their challenges, complex histories, dreams for the future, and successes. These interactions deepened their understanding of reentry, shifted their attitudes towards formerly and presently incarcerated people, and changed the way they engage with the work.

On several occasions, journalists visited prisons. In one example, Emma Restrepo, at the time a journalist and radio host of El Zol Radio, coordinated a focus group at Graterford Prison between journalists and Latino men on the inside with life sentences. The incarcerated men were provided with Reentry Project articles to share their feedback, which generated a list of new topics the collective could cover. The discussion also was a space for the men to share their critique of the criminal justice system and mass incarceration, as well as describe the lack of resources for people reentering. In her final report on the focus group, Emma notes that “prisoners expressed an important sense of justice and inclusion” and a “deep sense of satisfaction” with the discussion¹⁵. Journalists present at the focus group describe feeling transformed after this experience, gaining a better understanding of the complexities of incarceration and seeing the humanity of people trapped on the inside, beyond just being a person who was

“Being in a prison for the first time is something I will remember for the rest of my life - an important visual memory that would not otherwise have happened.”

- Julie Zeglen, Generocity

“For journalists to have the opportunity to go to prison – that changes the way you see the problem. The smell of a prison, the feeling that you come out but they stay, the feeling even after one hour. That is a very specific feeling – when you cross the last door, and you are outside and they are inside. Some with no hope of coming out. The most important thing – you experience reality.”

- Emma Restrepo, Dos Puntos

“I can see the community with more empathy. In some cases, generations are being incarcerated – fathers, and then sons. Now I understand more about the struggle and social issues. I can understand from a human perspective and also a professional perspective.” - Emma Restrepo, Dos Puntos

“Building connections - that was really eye opening. Every so often you find that person who you’re talking to and see them face to face and realize the challenges, and making a difference in their lives by telling their story. I met him and few other people like that, that I was able to build a connection with that really helped me understand the issue of reentry.”

- Peak Johnson, formerly Billy Penn

¹⁵ Restrepo, E. (2017). Focus group report. Provided by Emma Restrepo via email communication on 10/10/2018.

“In some ways, it changed my view. Hearing the stories of formerly incarcerated people - the challenges, the disrespect. It sticks with you, gives you different level of empathy, even if you’re a progressive minded person with intellectual belief that people should be re-integrated. It brought home an emotional significance.”

- Paul Socolar, formerly The Notebook

6. Amplified an Issue Previously on the Margins

Scale of Impact:	Micro		Meso		Macro	
Dimensions:	Awareness	Behavior	Belief	Capacity	Institutional	Condition

The Reentry Project was not the sole voice calling for reentry solutions, but amplified the ongoing chorus during a specific political moment. The effort increased the volume of coverage on reentry and contributed towards the sustained attention on a topic that had largely been on the margins of most media outlets.

For Philadelphia, 2016 through 2017 was a unique political moment for criminal justice reforms. After years of mobilization and movement building by grassroots and prison organizers¹⁶, Philadelphia saw significant progressive gains, such as the election of former civil rights attorney and public defender, Larry Krasner as the District Attorney, a \$3.5 million grant from the MacArthur Foundation to reduce the city’s prison population, the commitment to closing the House of Corrections (“the Creek”), and a 20% reduction in the city’s jail population. This wave of large-scale changes neatly coincided with the Reentry Project.

Meso-scale change in awareness and behavior: Respondents noted this moment, and while few could point conclusively to a direct link between the Reentry Project and these changes, many thought that the Reentry Project added to the momentum. It was one of the few times in Philadelphia’s recent history that multiple newsrooms were doggedly focused on one topic, moving forward together.

“I would read more coverage than what I usually get and it would make me think differently about our organizing. See this report on ‘X’, how can we use that and talk about that. Having that information, having it pulled in a simple narrative format, rather than having to refer to the papers themselves that was good.”

- Hannah Jane Sassaman, Media Mobilizing Project

“I think the Reentry Project had a huge impact – there’s no question that city of Philadelphia is leading on issues on criminal justice and how we’re going to define it. The unflinching eye of journalists looking at this issue has a lot to do with people being energized.”

- Councilmember Helen Gym, Philadelphia City Council

“Significant public policy issue that was hardly on people’s radar was now popping up in many media outlets - TV, Spanish language press, mainstream daily, radio, etc. It was a blitz of coverage. Dramatic increase in visibility and inclusion of voices I’m not sure would have gotten much attention.”

- Paul Socolar, formerly The Notebook

¹⁶See, e.g.,: <https://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/prisoners-organized-elect-larry-krasner-philadelphia-district-attorney/>

“This was a topic a lot of people weren’t interested in, didn’t care about, didn’t think was relevant. [The Reentry Project] was able to put it front in center on the radars of a very broad range of media outlets in the city with consistency. That’s powerful. Media is so powerful when it decides to do that.”

- Sara Lomax Reese, WURD

“All these media organizations were focusing on one issue that we all agreed was an important issue in Philadelphia, and doing it from perspectives that our varying audiences could relate to. That gave it a journalism-centered impact, which is an accomplishment.”

– Roxanne Shepelavy, The Philadelphia Citizen



Photograph by: Kriston Bethel

CONCLUSION

The Reentry Project did something unprecedented in Philadelphia – it brought together diverse stakeholders in media, philanthropy, the academy and reentry to shape public narratives of criminal justice reform for over a year. While there had been some attempts at large-scale media collaboration in the past, the Reentry Project was the first to succeed at such an extensive level, and did so while holding two values at the forefront: 1) journalism can educate and activate the public when it provides solutions and 2) the work must honor the unique expertise of those most impacted by the issue.

This assessment is not a quantitative study on how the coverage and the events of the Reentry Project changed the attitudes, beliefs or behaviors of the public. Rather it is a deep examination of the experiences of those that participated in the collaborative, and the internal transformation that can happen in media collaboratives. From partners' own accounts it's clear that the Reentry Project inspired significant tangible and intangible impacts. The tangible impacts included changes to hiring and business practices at several local entities. Moreover, several partners leveraged the lessons, relationships and resources from the Reentry Project to start new initiatives.

The intangible impacts were profound and far reaching. There emerged a continuum of individual, group and institutional change, where: the extensive collaboration deepened relationships, built trust and expanded the capacity of media partners. This collaboration spread and set norms around solutions journalism and community engagement. In turn, these practices encouraged more in-depth, humanizing reporting and events, and elevated the experience and leadership of those most impacted by incarceration. The close and personal nature of the work transformed journalists in the process, building empathy and awareness around the issue of reentry. Finally, all of these components of the projects were additive, amplifying a unique moment for criminal justice reform in Philadelphia. In light of these impacts, the Reentry Project may serve as a model for other media constellations considering new ways to inspire change.



Photograph by: Kriston Bethel

SIDENOTE

A consistent theme in the interviews was the significant role of the Project Editor in making the initiative a success. Nearly everyone interviewed mentioned that they joined the collaborative after having an inperson meeting with Jean Friedman Rudovsky. Several respondents commented on the particular skills that Jean employed that, in their opinion, made the difference. The following is a synthesis of the skills mentioned in interviews as well as those provided in an interview with Jean.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROJECT EDITOR

1. Be clear about the role.

Is this role more of a Project Manager or Editorial Leader? Will they be responsible for fundraising? This is to set expectations with partners as well as to know how much time the Project Editor has to dedicate to various components of the project.

2. Be humble.

Recognize this position is different from any others in a newsroom. The Project Editor doesn't, in the end, really have control and partners are typically doing this on top of their existing workload. Build collaboratively.

3. Be creative in inspiring participation.

The project can have enough going on to be exciting but not overwhelming. Set some group goals that everyone can agree to early on in the process.

4. Do the tedious follow-up.

Recognize that you'll have to communicate with partners in different ways. Part of the job is being accommodating to partners who have unrelenting schedules. Learn who prefers texts vs. emails vs. phone vs. in-person.

5. Prioritize tasks that build relationships.

Prioritize personal connections, knowing that reporting will only get better as relationships have space to grow. Get to know people, try to understand their lives, without asking for anything. Show up for each other.

6. Look for gaps.

The Project Editor is in the unique position to see across the whole collaborative. Make connections and look for opportunities, such as story ideas, funding, trainings or other resources. Share these freely with the group.

7. Go with a question.

This is especially true for community engagement. Lead with few pre-formed ideas or structures, ask what is important and of value to the community and local leaders.

8. Be aware of historical cultural tensions and power dynamics.

Invest more effort into genuine relationship-building with groups historically marginalized from mainstream media. Seek to understand their concerns. Have an informed analysis of race and class. Refer to #2 and #7 often.

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Reentry Project Impact - Interview Protocol

Before we begin, would you mind if I recorded this conversation to refer back to later?

A. Introduction

1. How did you first learn of the Reentry Project?
2. How would you describe your involvement with or connection to the Reentry Project?

B. Changes Regarding Reentry

1. Prior to the Reentry Project, what experience did you have regarding the reentry process or how familiar were you to the issues faced by returning citizens?
 - a. (Micro Awareness) Did that understanding change at all during or after your involvement with the Reentry Project? If so, in what way(s)?
 - b. (Meso Awareness) In your opinion, did the reporting and events of the Reentry Project lead to greater public awareness regarding Reentry? If so, what were some examples you observed?
2. (Micro Attitudes) Did the Reentry Project change the way you viewed returning citizens? How?
 - a. (Meso Attitudes) Do you think the Reentry Project changed the way the public views or talks about returning citizens? How? (can ask how were returning citizens spoken about prior to 2016)
3. REENTRY PARTNER (Micro Behaviors) Did your involvement with the Reentry Project prompt you to do your work differently, especially around criminal justice reform or the reentry process?

C. Changes Regarding Media and Journalism

1. (Micro Beliefs) In your view, what is the role of news media and journalism?
 - a. How does the reporting and coverage of the Reentry Project fit into that view?
2. Prior to the Reentry Project, what experience did you have regarding the collaborative journalism or solutions-oriented journalism?
 - a. (Micro Awareness) How did your understanding of solutions-oriented journalism change as a result of your involvement with the Reentry Project?
 - b. (Meso Awareness) In your opinion, did the reporting and events of the Reentry Project lead to broader awareness regarding solutions-oriented journalism? If so, what were some examples you observed?

3. MEDIA PARTNER (Micro Behaviors) Did your involvement with the Reentry Project prompt you to do your work differently? How so?

a. Did you or your organization adopt ways to measure the impact of the Reentry Project? What were those methods?

4. NON-MEDIA PARTNER (Micro Behaviors/Attitudes) Did the efforts of the Reentry Project change the way that you consume news or view news media? How so?

a. Any trust in the coverage you had for the Reentry Project - what was that due to? Was it that you knew the reporters and journalists, or that it was a separate entity or something else?

D. Broader Impact of Reentry Project

1. PARTNER (Process: Network Building) I think one goal of the Reentry Project was to create trust where there may not have previously been - whether that was among media partners who typically see each other as competitors, or between journalists and people who have the lived experience of incarceration and reentry. Was this true for you? What did these relationships mean to you?

a. What do you think contributed to that trust?

2. PARTNER (Process: Ownership, Reflection, Feeling Heard) Were there other ways in which the process felt meaningful?

3. (Meso/Macro Capacity) In your life, did the Reentry Project lead to any new connections, or sources of funding? (can also ask about new projects, jobs, developed leadership)

a. Have you heard from other people that this was true for them or their organization?

4. (Meso/Macro Action/Institutional Change) Have you observed any new policies, programs or initiatives dealing with reentry that may be attributed to the Reentry Project?

5. (Meso/Macro Action/Institutional Change) Have you seen or heard of instances where reentry became a priority for a major institution, city agency or influential person in Philadelphia? If so, what was the role of the Reentry Project?

6. Are there aspects of the Reentry Project that could have been improved upon? What were some of the challenges?

7. What, in your opinion, was the most meaningful impact of the Reentry Project?

8. (Persistent Input/Change) What, in your opinion, has been the lasting (long-term) impact of the Reentry Project?

E. Specific FollowUp Questions (when applicable)

Funders

The Reentry Project, an initiative of the Solutions Journalism Network, would not have been possible without generous support from The Knight Foundation.



**SOLUTIONS
JOURNALISM
NETWORK**

Resolve Philadelphia would like to thank its funders:

*The Knight Foundation,
The Lenfest Institute for Journalism,
Wyncote Foundation,
The Philadelphia Foundation, News Integrity Initiative,
The RoBN Foundation,
and Solutions Journalism Network.*



Illustration courtesy of Mike Jackson and Technically Media

RESOLVE
PHILADELPHIA

The
REENTRY
PROJECT