



Reducing Recidivism at No Cost Using Data and Science

Overview

RIPL built an effective, low-cost solution to reduce recidivism by creating a value-added measure to help policymakers understand how well in-prison training programs prepare inmates for life after incarceration. **Reallocating existing resources in the prison system can reduce recidivism by three percent.**

How do we measure whether a training program reduces recidivism?

In the United States, up to 68 percent of released inmates are re-arrested within three years.¹ Upon release from prison, formerly incarcerated individuals face many barriers to reintegration. In-prison training programs attempt to reduce these barriers by providing inmates with skills that foster successful reintegration and reduced recidivism.

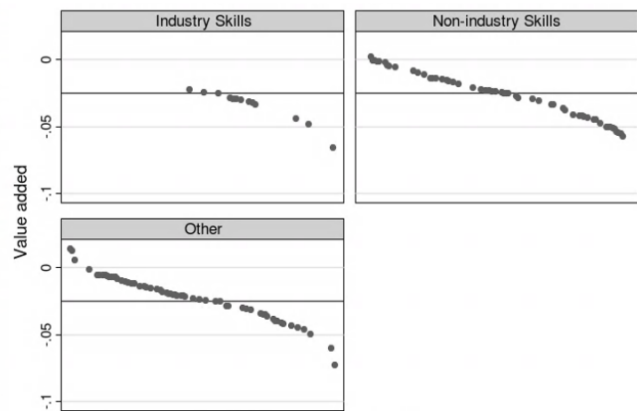
In partnership with the Office of the Governor and Rhode Island executive agencies, RIPL used an integrated data lake of anonymized administrative records to measure the impact of each in-prison training program on recidivism. To truly measure what works, we developed a Return-on-Investment measure called *value-added*, or how much a program reduces the probability of recidivism given an inmate's background and baseline probability of recidivating. In other words, we measure if the program *causes* a reduction in recidivism, not if it simply attracts individuals with a lower likelihood of recidivating in the first place.

RIPL found the following:

1. Transferring individuals from low value-added to high value-added programs **could reduce recidivism by roughly three percent.**
2. The most effective programs are those that provide **job-specific skills** in industries that are likelier to hire former inmates, and provide important basic skills and education, such as construction training.
3. Causal analysis shows that some programs with **low mean recidivism rates do not appear to reduce recidivism**, but instead likely enroll inmates with low recidivism probability to begin with.

In most facilities, corrections counselors currently lack information on which programs are most effective at reducing recidivism when recommending training program to inmates. Our results suggest that **simply reallocating existing resources can effectively reduce recidivism** and improve outcomes for incarcerated individuals at no additional cost to the state.

Figure 1. Value-added to 36-month recidivism (negative is better) for in-prison training programs



Notes: The line shows mean value-added of programs, equal to a -0.025 percentage point reduction in the probability of 36-month recidivism rates. Each dot on the graph represents the mean value-added estimate for a training program in each category. Programs below the line are more effective than the average program at reducing recidivism. Programs above the line are less effective than the average program at reducing recidivism. The more negative a value-added estimate, the larger the reduction in recidivism it causes, relative to an inmate's baseline probability of recidivating.

"Industry Skills" include construction or food services. "Non-Industry Skills" include languages, math and basic software. "Other" includes classes such as yoga or history.