

Department of Homeland Security (DHS)
FY2020 Targeted Violence and Terrorism
Prevention (TVTP) Grantee Evaluation

Site Profile

Counter Extremism Project



Developed for:



Science and
Technology

Developed by RTI International

List of Abbreviations

4R	Radicalization, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, and Recidivism
AP	Alternative Pathways
CEP	Counter Extremism Project
CLS	Criminal Legal System
CP3	Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
IMP	Implementation and Measurement Plan
IRB	Institutional Review Board
TVTP	Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention
VFRE	Violent Far Right Extremist

Executive Summary

The Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Directorate contracted RTI International to conduct research and evaluation of the Counter Extremism Project's (CEP's) FY2020 Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (TVTP) grant implementation to examine accomplishments, challenges, and recommendations. The research team conducted a process evaluation of all components of CEP's grant project. The team reviewed training curricula and other materials provided by CEP and interviewed staff and project partners. A summary of findings is in Table ES-A.

CEP successfully developed a theory of change and curriculum for its Alternative Pathways (AP) program, which is designed to prevent individuals involved in the criminal legal system from radicalizing to violent extremism and to assist violent extremism-affiliated offenders in reintegrating while reducing recidivism in the long-term. Ultimately, CEP was unable to identify a prison or other correctional institution willing to pilot its in-person AP course, a primary element of its FY20 grant project. However, CEP engaged in extensive conversations throughout the grant period with various institutions and relevant stakeholders; these conversations indicated that some institutions may be interested in implementing the course after the grant period. CEP was able to successfully recruit violent extremism-affiliated offenders to voluntarily participate in the AP course through a written format, with 10 incarcerated individuals completing the course. CEP continued to provide ad hoc, informal, and voluntary support to five of these individuals upon their release from prison. CEP was limited in the data it could collect from participants in its AP written course, and researchers' ability to review these data was further limited due to Institutional Review Board (IRB) concerns. While CEP is not able to share the outcomes of its curriculum, it has shared the AP theory of change and curriculum with global practitioners through the Radicalization, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, and Recidivism (4R) Network, established under its separate FY2021 TVTP grant.

Table ES-A: Summary of Findings

 <p>Objectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A 10-week counter-extremism course appropriate for replication in institutions around the country is developed with national accessibility • Increase the awareness of at least 72 inmates of radicalization risk factors, underlying causes, and evidence-based counter-radicalization and self-care practices • At least 72 inmates are made aware of the AP program and other post-release support services • At least 300 terrorism-related offenders or those with known affiliation to violent extremism movements are made aware of the AP program
 <p>Outputs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed the AP theory of change • Developed the AP curriculum • Reached out to 165 terrorism-related offenders and engaged with 68 of these regarding participation in the written AP course • Ten terrorism-related offenders completed the written AP course
 <p>Challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty gaining buy-in from correctional institutions prevented CEP from implementing its in-person trainings • Mistrust from offenders made recruitment to the written correspondence course challenging • Inconsistent and strenuous prison mail requirements posed a logistical challenge for recruitment to the written correspondence course • Implementation was delayed due to a lengthy IRB review process
 <p>Recommendations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider extending the length of program funding to accommodate prison timelines and the long-term nature of exiting a violent extremist ideology or group • Consider focusing programming on alternative populations that are often easier to access than prisoners, such as criminal legal system personnel or community supervision populations • Build partnerships with criminal legal system stakeholders and institutions to assist in gaining buy-in • Communicate the costs and benefits of programming to encourage buy-in

Site Profile: Counter Extremism Project

The Counter Extremism Project (CEP) was awarded a two-year grant by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3) in 2020 and was selected in 2021 to undergo an independent evaluation by RTI International. This site profile reviews CEP's grant design, implementation, accomplishments, challenges, and relevant recommendations for future programming in Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (TVTP). After completing an evaluability assessment, a process evaluation was conducted on CEP's FY2020 TVTP grant, the findings of which are detailed in this report. The research team examined the processes CEP followed when implementing this grant to learn what mechanisms may contribute to a project's effectiveness and to detail project accomplishments at the output level.

For CEP's full Implementation and Measurement Plan (IMP), which outlines its goals, target audiences, objectives, activities, inputs, time frame, anticipated outputs, performance measures, and data collection plan, please contact DHS.

Counter Extremism Project

CEP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan international policy organization operating in the United States and Germany. CEP was founded with the intention of combating the growing threat posed by extremist ideologies. To promote these goals, CEP undertakes a variety of activities including research, analysis, technical resource assistance, and policy advocacy.

CEP's FY2020 Grant

Grant Summary

CEP's TVTP grant focused on the development and delivery of the Alternative Pathways (AP) curriculum. The grant had three primary components: the development of the curriculum, its delivery via in-person classes, and its delivery via written correspondence. The curriculum was designed to assist violent extremist-affiliated criminal offenders in their rehabilitation and reintegration, while reducing recidivism in the long-term, and to decrease the likelihood of in-prison radicalization for criminal offenders not affiliated with a violent extremist group or ideology. In this case, violent extremist-affiliated offenders might include individuals who were incarcerated for an extremism-related crime or who were incarcerated for a crime unrelated to extremism but who have known affiliations with an extremist group or ideology.

For the in-person training, CEP sought to implement the AP curriculum as a 10-week course among a target audience of 72 inmates. For the written format of the AP course, CEP reached out to violent extremism-related offenders in correctional institutions across the United States. Offenders who agreed to participate then completed the AP curriculum adapted to the written format. Post-release, CEP provided these individuals with ad hoc support, as appropriate.

In support of its grant, CEP worked with Parallel Networks, a nonprofit organization that works to combat polarization, hate, and extremism in the United States. Parallel Networks provided support to all three components of the grant project.

Design and Methods for Process Evaluation

As part of the process evaluation of CEP's grant, researchers reviewed all documentation, such as the AP theory of change and training curriculum. Researchers also conducted interviews with staff and project partners. The process evaluation was conducted from September 2021 through July 2023; as such, this site profile details CEP's process, activities, and outputs as of July 31, 2023, two months before the grant ended.

The evaluation of CEP's grant is limited for two reasons. First, CEP was unable to collect much of its planned data because of challenges that it faced in implementing the AP in-person training, which will be discussed in greater detail below. Second, researchers were not authorized to collect or review data from prisoners in the written correspondence course due to a combination of RTI's Institutional Review Board (IRB) determination and DHS's adoption of the Common Rule.¹

Nevertheless, CEP's efforts toward administering its in-person training curriculum can contribute important insight into the challenges facing implementers of this work and possible solutions to these challenges.

Findings

AP Curriculum Development

This section examines process evaluation findings regarding CEP's AP in-person training component, which corresponds with Goal 1, Objective 1.1 in CEP's IMP.

Objective 1.1: A 10-week counter-extremism course appropriate for replication in institutions around the country is developed with national accessibility.

Curriculum for Addressing Radicalization and Facilitating Reintegration of Terrorism-Related Offenders and Individuals with Violent Extremist Affiliations

As a first step toward developing the AP curriculum, Parallel Networks and Dr. John Horgan conducted a systematic review of the relevant literature to develop a theory of change.² The theory of change specifically focused on AP's intended target population—violent extremism-related offenders and those with known violent extremist affiliations in the United States—and used a trauma-informed approach for the reintegration of these offenders. As illustrated in Figure 1, the central goal identified by the theory of change was “to facilitate the safe, healthy, and dignified rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist-affiliated criminal offenders in the United States while decreasing the likelihood of in-prison radicalization and increasing local resilience to violent extremism over the long term.” The theory of change document provides a clear explanation of the key variables associated with the overall goal (i.e., “safe, healthy, and dignified”) and the theory of change's general assumptions, objectives (shown in Figure 1), necessary preconditions, strategies, and proposed interventions.

1 Common Rule 45 CFR §46 restricts the federal government and its contractors from collecting data that “involves a category of subjects that is vulnerable to coercion or undue influence, such as children, prisoners, individuals with impaired decision-making capacity, or economically or educationally disadvantaged persons.”

2 Available at <https://4rnetwork.org/>. 

Figure 1. Visual representation of the Alternative Pathways theory of change



Parallel Networks then developed the curriculum “Alternative Pathways: A Toolkit for Addressing Radicalization & Facilitating Rehabilitation, Reentry, and Reconnection amongst Imprisoned Americans,” consisting of 10 lessons (Figure 2).³ The curriculum draws upon the CTRL+ALT+DEL-HATE process, developed by Parallel Networks, as its underlying framework:

CTRL: controlling the space between stimulus and response, in order to;

ALT: alter course and move forward in a manner that commits to nonviolence and finds meaning, purpose, and community that can reorient our lives and personal stories, so that we can;

DEL-HATE: work to delete hate and toxicity in our own selves and, as a consequence, in those around us, so that we can contribute to building a better tomorrow for all.

Lessons are faith-neutral and each one includes lesson objectives, definitions of key concepts, discussion questions, and writing assignments to help participants to process the information covered in the lesson and how it applies to themselves.

3 The AP curriculum is available to 4R Network members here: <https://4rnetwork.org/prison-resources>.

Figure 2. AP Lesson Topics

- 1 Jonah, the Belly of the Beast, and the Nexus between Narrative, Trauma, and Radicalization
- 2 What is Radicalization? How Does It Connect to Violence?
- 3 Neuroscience of Toxic Stress, Radicalization, and Violence Prevention
- 4 Critical Thinking, Cognitive Bias, and Controlling the Space between Stimulus and Response
- 5 The Power of Social Media: Resiliency to Online Radicalization and Recruitment
- 6 Black and White/Us-vs-Them: The Tribalism Trap
- 7 New World (Dis)Order: Fake-News Conspiracy Theories and Their Role in Radicalization
- 8 Toxic Masculinity, Radicalization, and Violence
- 9 Man’s Search for Meaning-Making, Narrative, Ideology, and Extremism
- 10 Alternative Pathways: Reorienting Radicalization for the Good

AP In-Person Training

This section examines process evaluation findings regarding CEP's AP in-person training component, which corresponds with Goal 2, Objectives 2.1 and 2.2 in CEP's IMP.

Objective 2.1-2.2:

2.1: At least 72 inmates' awareness of radicalization risk factors, underlying causes, and evidence-based counter-radicalization and self-care practices increases.

2.2: At least 72 inmates made aware of Alternative Pathways program and other post-release supports.

In-Person Course Recruitment Efforts

The in-person AP course was originally designed as a 10-week course with one session per week, and was intended to be implemented in prisons in the United States. Specifically, as of the beginning of CEP's grant, it intended to deliver the training to a prison in California. CEP sought to administer the course to a total of 72 inmates, with approximately half of those inmates convicted for Salafi-jihadist offenses and the other half previously or currently affiliated with violent far right extremist (VFRE) movements or prison gangs.

Unfortunately, CEP was unable to identify a prison or other correctional institution that was willing to implement the AP training during the grant period. Although it was unsuccessful, CEP undertook extensive efforts in its search to identify and recruit correctional institutions and to adapt to those institutions' needs and contexts, including communicating with a wide range of stakeholders across the United States. In total, CEP spoke with seven prisons (five in California, one in New York, one in Washington, DC) and held conversations, sent information, or provided presentations to 21 other relevant stakeholders. These stakeholders included a state Department of Corrections, a magistrate judge, and individuals currently implementing other programs in prisons and jails, among others. CEP additionally presented the AP curriculum to the National Network of Probation Officers to encourage officers either to refer probationers to the program or to participate in the training themselves following a "train-the-trainer" model, in which probation officers would then deliver the curriculum directly to their probationers. This range of individuals demonstrates the variety of pathways that CEP took toward identifying a setting for training implementation.

As of the writing of this report, CEP is in conversation with some of these institutions about implementing the AP training on a broader, nationwide scale. Additionally, CEP received a request to train staff at a United States Probation

Office on the AP curriculum and received at least one referral to implement the curriculum with a probationer being supervised by this office. Although these decisions and any resulting implementation will occur after the conclusion of the grant, it is possible that CEP will still be able to pilot its in-person training. If this is the case, the research team recommends that CEP collect data, such as pre- and posttests, to measure change in participant awareness and knowledge of the AP curriculum. These data will demonstrate the effectiveness of the AP in-person training, which will be critical for strengthening the TVTP evidence base and future programming. Additionally, if the training is found to be effective, it will improve the chances that other correctional institutions are willing to implement the AP program moving forward. CEP should also document process-related data, such as recruitment procedures, selection criteria, the training structure and format, and facilitator's notes. While pre- and posttests can measure the training's effectiveness, these elements will help to understand what may have contributed to or detracted from the training's effectiveness. They will also document how the training was implemented, which is critical for future training replicability.

Adaptations to Course Design

Throughout CEP's conversations with various prisons and correctional institutions, it discovered that some were interested in implementing the AP course but wanted it to be adapted to institution-specific needs and context. In response to these requests, CEP made a series of modifications to the course structure and content to make the curriculum agreeable while also maintaining the core of the curriculum. Though these modified courses were not used during the grant period, the requested alterations are detailed below.

Target Population. The curriculum was initially designed for a target population of violent extremism-related offenders

and those with known violent extremist affiliations. However, during discussions with one California prison regarding participant recruitment, CEP determined that it would allow any inmate to participate. CEP made this adaptation because it posited that the curriculum would still apply to individuals susceptible to radicalization and, due to the presence of extremist groups in prisons in the United States, any inmate could be susceptible. As such, it planned to conduct open recruitment of prisoners using marketing materials, as well as more targeted recruitment of prisoners by the prison chaplain or mental health providers.

Cadence. While the course was originally designed to take place over 10 weeks, with one session per week, CEP also discussed with various prisons the possibility of condensing the course timeline (e.g., holding two sessions per week for a total of five weeks).

Structure. One New York prison indicated that it had previously had success with courses that took a “train-the-trainer” or mentorship approach. Under this approach, the prison requested that the AP course be delivered to a smaller group of individuals (e.g., 10–15) who would serve as unofficial mentors to other inmates by passing on the information and skills covered during the in-person sessions. In response to this request, CEP adjusted the existing curriculum to incorporate this cascading approach.

Extremism Focus. The same New York prison noted that its inmates were primarily involved in gang violence as opposed to extremist groups. As such, the prison requested that CEP adapt the curriculum to include a focus on general violence prevention, which CEP did.

Extensive Efforts to Recruit Correctional Institutions Illustrate Implementation Challenges

Although CEP was unable to identify a correctional institution that was willing to participate in the AP in-person course, the challenges CEP faced in this regard can still provide useful information for practitioners, funders, and other stakeholders in this space. These difficulties illustrate many of the challenges that any practitioner faces when attempting to implement programming within correctional settings in the United States.

Challenges in Securing Buy-In of Correctional Institutions

- 1 Hesitance to administer new, unproven interventions
- 2 Resource constraints amid extensive bureaucratic procedures
- 3 Inhibited communication resulting from decentralized prison system

First, multiple correctional institutions were wary of administering a new intervention that had never been implemented or tested elsewhere. This will continue to be a challenge for any practitioner attempting to implement a novel approach or program, which constitutes a critical obstacle to progress in the still-nascent TVTP space as the field continues to test what works and for whom.

Second, many correctional institutions are facing significant resource constraints and understaffing. Coupled with the extensive bureaucratic procedures in place across the United States for implementing in-prison programming, this meant that CEP had to wait substantial amounts of time to receive responses or approvals from prison staff before moving on to the next step in the approval process. For example, CEP worked with one prison in California for eight months (January to August 2022), going through various steps to gain approval to implement. At the end of those eight months, CEP still had tasks remaining to gain final approval, but the prison staff stopped responding altogether. In addition to resource constraints, CEP’s difficulty in recruiting a California prison may also have come as a result of recent prison closures in the state.⁴

Third, the decentralization of the prison system in the United States means that practitioners seeking to implement in-prison programming do not have a clear channel for contacting prisons that may be interested in participating. In CEP’s case, it sought to overcome this by drawing upon its own contacts to get in touch with various institutions and stakeholders, in addition to numerous contacts provided by DHS CP3.

⁴ Prison closures were made because sentencing reforms and a surge of releases tied to COVID-19 significantly reduced the prison population in California.

Alternative Pathways Written Correspondence Course

This section examines process evaluation findings regarding CEP's written version of the AP training, which correspond with Goal 3, Objectives 3.1 and 3.2 in CEP's IMP.

Objectives 3.1-3.2:

3.1: At least 300 terrorism-related offenders or those with known affiliation to violent extremism movements made aware of the Alternative Pathways program.

3.2: At least 20 at-risk offenders supported by AP program with anonymized data (case studies) to inform identification of best practices and research and training materials.

Written Correspondence Course Recruitment

The written version of CEP's course uses the same AP curriculum as the in-person version, which is split into 10 lessons. CEP intended to administer the course with a total of 20 offenders from across the United States. During implementation, CEP sent each lesson to offenders to read and complete on their own, in addition to holding parallel conversations with offenders to assist them in processing the information via mail, e-mail, or phone.

CEP began its recruitment process by selecting publicly available databases to assist in identifying potential participants including the New America Foundations' Terrorism in America After 9/11 database, George Washington University's ISIS in America and Capitol Hill Siege Cases databases, and two databases that have since become inactive. Additionally, CEP staff tracked convictions of individuals through open source documents, such as Department of Justice publications. As of July 2023, CEP identified 295 offenders through these databases and publications and contacted 165 of them through prison mail. CEP began its outreach in January 2022, after it received IRB approval to do so (15 months into the grant period). Because the IRB approval process took significantly longer than expected, CEP was unable to contact several individuals it had previously identified because they had completed their sentences, had been extradited to their countries of origin, were deceased, or were no longer traceable within the Bureau of Prisons system. This resulted in the difference between the number of individuals identified and those contacted. CEP continued to identify and contact additional offenders over the course of its grant as new individuals were added to these databases and new convictions were published. Outreach letters were tailored based on offenders' sentencing and prison release dates.

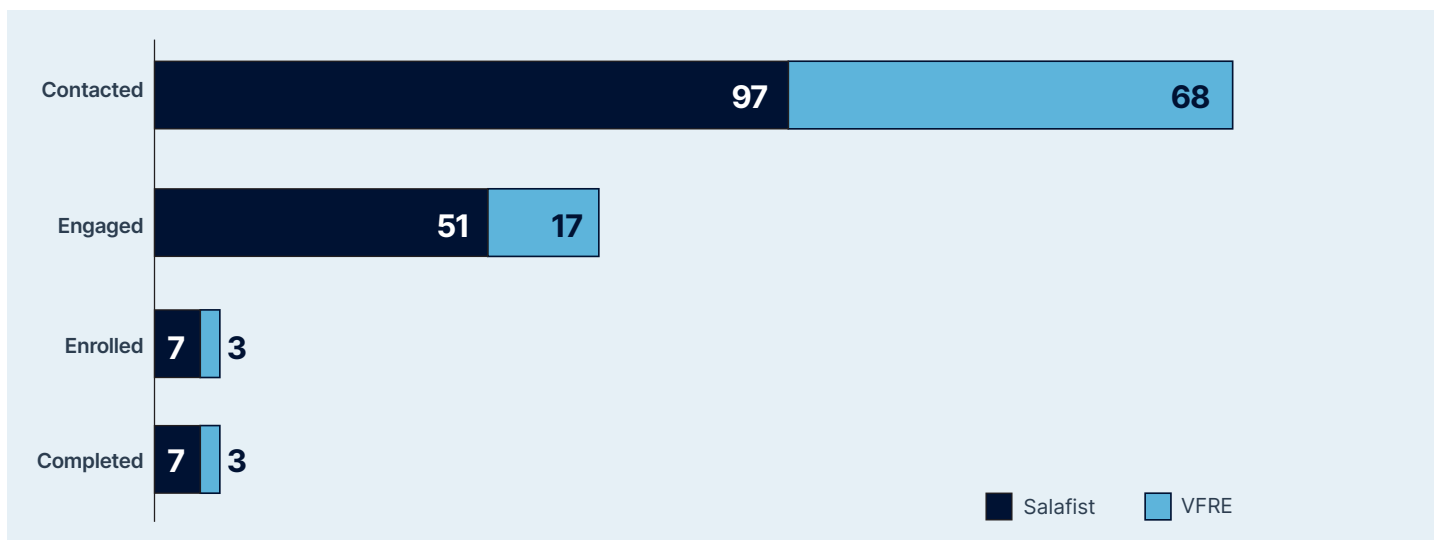
Engaging with Offenders to Build Rapport and Voluntary Participation

Pre-course engagement was a critical and necessary step to building trust with offenders, which in turn was critical in securing their voluntary participation.

Of the 165 offenders that were contacted, 68 engaged in some way with CEP staff (41%) (Figure 3 shows all of CEP's recruitment statistics). Often, this entailed an ongoing dialogue over written mail, e-mail, or phone, through which a CEP staff person built rapport with the offender and answered their questions or concerns regarding the AP course. This pre-course engagement was a critical and necessary step to building trust with offenders, which in turn was critical in securing their voluntary participation in the course.

Ten offenders (15% of those engaged with, 6% of those contacted) ultimately agreed to enroll in the AP course, all of whom completed it. Of these 10, seven were affiliated with a Salafi-jihadist ideology or group, and three were affiliated with a VFRE ideology or group. The most common reasons that offenders gave for choosing not to enroll, when a reason was given, were: (1) they were disillusioned with programs that sought to assist them because of negative experiences with other such programs, and (2) they were distrustful of the CEP staff's intentions and believed they might be attempting to covertly gather intelligence. In anticipation of this mistrust, CEP received a waiver that allowed it to not include DHS branding in AP materials, as it expected that associating the programming with DHS would cause offenders to become more mistrustful and to feel that their data was being collected for the purposes of sharing it with DHS.

Figure 3. Number of offenders contacted, engaged, enrolled, and completed for the course, by ideology



CEP originally planned to administer pre- and post-course assessments but ultimately chose not to because of this mistrust among offenders. CEP felt that any feeling of being “tested” or “assessed” would push offenders away from participation. The CEP staff person who administered the course recorded notes on their conversations with offenders, which may be able to anecdotally demonstrate offenders’ progress and grasp of the course content; however, the research team was unable to access these data due to the IRB concerns mentioned previously.

Post-Release Support

CEP does not have a formalized process for continued engagement with graduates of the AP course. However, the same CEP staff member who administered the course continued to engage with participants following their completion of the course, subject to each offender’s willingness to continue communication. The 10 offenders who completed the course were at varying stages in their sentences, with some released shortly after the course and some still incarcerated as of the end of the grant period. As those offenders neared release, CEP supported them in connecting with individuals in their local community, family members, and community resources. Following the offenders’ release, CEP continued to hold ad hoc, informal conversations with them to provide interpersonal support. Additionally, this CEP staff member offered to speak with released offenders’ probation officers to provide the officers with their insight into the offender based on their participation in the AP course. One released offender’s probation officer chose to work closely with the CEP

staff member to gain their input as the officer designed the post-release plan. Unfortunately, it is not possible to examine the long-term, post-release outcomes for written AP course participants, as the grant period does not allow for it.

Information Sharing

CEP’s efforts to analyze its work and share this information with the practitioner community correspond with Goal 4, Objective 4.1 in CEP’s IMP.

Objective 4.1: Knowledge of extremism and best practices in reentry and reintegration amongst those tasked with post-release supervision of inmates with known affiliations to violent extremism movements increases.

Researchers did not conduct an evaluation of CEP’s information-sharing efforts under the FY2020 grant. As CEP was not able to implement its in-person training, it did not collect the data it originally intended to analyze under this objective. Additionally, much of CEP’s information-sharing efforts are being conducted under its FY2021 TVTP grant, through which it has established the Radicalization, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, and Recidivism (4R) Network with practitioners in the United States and abroad. CEP has used the 4R Network to share the AP curriculum and best practices in the field. CEP additionally plans to host an event in Washington, DC, with the Alliance for Peacebuilding to present on the grant project.

Challenges

Buy-In from Correctional Institutions. As discussed throughout this report, gaining the buy-in from prisons or other correctional institutions was the greatest challenge that CEP faced and ultimately prevented CEP from implementing its in-person course during the grant period. This difficulty in gaining the commitment of a prison stemmed from a range of factors outside of CEP's control, including strains placed on prisons by the COVID-19 pandemic, limited prison resources and prison understaffing, and a lack of willingness to implement novel programming among a sensitive population.

Recruitment of Offenders in Correctional Settings.

CEP faced both logistical and substantive challenges in recruiting extremism-related offenders in prison to participate in its written correspondence course. First, prison mailing requirements—which CEP relied entirely upon when offenders were not allowed access to phone or e-mail—were strenuous, opaque, and inconsistent across institutions. Second, offenders being contacted by CEP in prison were often mistrustful of CEP's underlying motives for contacting them.

Implementation Delays due to Privacy Reviews. CEP experienced initial delays in getting its project started due to the IRB process. CEP's third-party IRB did not ultimately approve the implementation of its curriculum and outreach until January 2022. While CEP's project sought to engage prisoners—who are a protected population and therefore require a full IRB review—this timeline was extensive and meant that CEP could not begin outreach and recruitment for its in-person training until 15 months into its initial 24-month grant period, which limited the number of individuals CEP was able to contact about enrolling in the written course.

IMP Accomplishments

CEP achieved its first objective through the development of the AP theory of change and training curriculum (Objective 1.1). As discussed, it was unable to meet its objective of delivering the AP curriculum in an in-person format to 72 inmates (Objectives 2.1 and 2.2). However, this was a result of external factors and barriers to gaining buy-in from correctional institutions, rather than faults in the

project design or implementation. CEP's efforts to identify a correctional institution have still yielded new relationships between CEP and such institutions. This has, in turn, led to ongoing conversations about potential opportunities to pilot the training after the grant period.

CEP successfully delivered the written format of its AP training to incarcerated extremism-related offenders across the United States by identifying 295 offenders, contacting 165, engaging with 68, and enrolling 10 in the course. Because the evaluation of CEP's grant only includes activities through the month of July 2023, it is possible that some of these numbers will increase slightly by the end of CEP's grant in September 2023. CEP continues to identify and reach out to offenders regarding its written correspondence course, so it is likely that it will meet or exceed its IMP target of 300 offenders identified. However, it is unlikely that CEP will be able to contact 300 offenders by the end of its grant period (Objective 3.1). CEP's response rate (68 out of 165 offenders responded to CEP's letter, or 41%) exceeded its target of 25%. Unfortunately, the rate of offenders who responded to its outreach and subsequently enrolled in the course (10 out of 68 offenders enrolled, or 15%) was lower than CEP's stated target of 33%. This meant that CEP fell short of its target of 20 offenders completing the course (Objective 3.2).

CEP was unable to collect the planned data it intended to analyze and share under Objective 4.1 because it was unable to implement its in-person course and because it was limited in the data it could collect from the written correspondence course. Although CEP therefore did not fulfill Objective 4.1 in the way it originally planned to, it is still working to share its knowledge of extremism and best practices in reentry and reintegration through the establishment of the 4R Network, which is primarily taking place under its FY2021 TVTP grant, and a conference with the Alliance for Peacebuilding, which is expected to take place after the grant period. CEP additionally discussed or presented on the AP program to a total of seven prisons and 21 other relevant stakeholders across the country and across a range of sectors. These discussions were limited to the program design, however, and did not include data regarding best practices.

CEP's Partner Survey Findings

CEP engaged three partners to support its FY2020 grant. Researchers surveyed these partners to understand their collaboration with CEP and the challenges they faced. However, because only two partners completed the survey, researchers are unable to report these partner responses in the interest of privacy.

Discussion

CEP developed a comprehensive theory of change and curriculum to serve as the foundation of its AP course. Despite extensive efforts to identify and gain the buy-in of a correctional institution, and despite CEP's willingness to adapt the curriculum to specific needs or contexts, it was ultimately unable to implement the AP course in its in-person format. CEP's experience in this regard still provides important information regarding implementation of in-prison TVTP programming, as it demonstrates key operational challenges to gaining buy-in and the amount of time that must be devoted to gain access to prisons.

CEP was able to administer the AP curriculum through its written format, with 10 extremism-related offenders from across the United States enrolling in and completing the course. This required extensive engagement on the part of CEP staff to overcome process-level challenges and build rapport with offenders to gain their participation. As of the end of the evaluation period, CEP has additionally provided ad hoc support to five of these individuals post-release.

Sustainability

CEP's AP theory of change and curriculum could be used by other TVTP implementers moving forward. While CEP has not made these resources publicly available, it has shared them with relevant practitioners and stakeholders through its 4R Network and will present on the AP program through a planned conference that is set to take place after the grant period.

Discussions between CEP and correctional institutions are still ongoing as of the end of the grant period, but it appears possible that CEP may be able to implement the AP training on a larger scale than originally anticipated in its FY2020 TVTP grant. Although these decisions have yet to be made, it is possible that CEP's curriculum will be funded through other sources beyond this grant project and integrated into longer-term programming.

CEP indicated that it plans to sustain its outreach and enrollment of extremism-related offenders in the written format of its AP course under alternate funding streams after its FY2020 TVTP grant.

Recommendations for TVTP Grant Program

✓ Incorporate IRB-Related Timing and Data Considerations Into Program Design.

CEP did not receive IRB approval to begin outreach and implementation of its AP training until 15 months into the grant period. CEP had not anticipated the length of the IRB review in its implementation timeline. In the future, DHS should make IRB-related processes and guidelines clear to grantees applying for TVTP grants, particularly for grantees who intend to work with protected populations such as incarcerated individuals. This may take the form of a webinar, for example, explaining the primary considerations around what an IRB does, how it might apply to different TVTP grants, and the process DHS utilizes for grantees that do not have their own IRB. In turn, grantees should account for this in their program design, building in staff time to work on IRB protocols and to adjust implementation timelines accordingly.

✓ Consider Extending the Length of Program Funding.

DHS should consider extending the length of funding for grant projects that seek to implement programming in prisons to accommodate the challenges detailed throughout this report. DHS did mitigate timeline constraints by approving a one-year no-cost extension for CEP, but even more time is needed to accommodate the recruitment of interested prisons and to navigate extensive prison bureaucratic procedures. Longer periods of performance would also respond to the need for full IRB reviews when working with prisoners, a protected population. Additionally, longer grant periods would reflect the long-term and nonlinear nature of exiting from a violent extremist ideology or group. Although CEP continued to work with some of its written course participants post-release, its grant ended before it could witness or measure long-term, demonstrable outcomes among these participants. Extending the period of performance would enable greater data collection to learn more about the short- and long-term results of such interventions—a critical gap in the TVTP field.

✓ Consider Focusing Programming on Alternative Populations.

CEP's grant sought to implement its AP course directly with prisoners, but prisons can be risk-adverse and therefore hesitant to administer new programming, particularly on a sensitive topic such as violent extremism. To mitigate the challenges to gaining buy-in from prisons and other criminal legal system (CLS) institutions, future grant projects should consider focusing their programming on alternative populations. First, grantees could consider working with community supervision populations (e.g., individuals under probation or parole), as they are often easier to access. Second, grantees might focus on training CLS personnel (e.g., correctional officers, probation officers) as opposed to individuals involved with the CLS—for example, through a “train-the-trainer” model. While this would prevent grantees from directly working with and collecting data from prisoners, for example, it would increase the likelihood of gaining access to a prison. It would also likely present a more sustainable approach, as personnel would be given the knowledge and skills needed when working with individuals susceptible to or already part of a violent extremist ideology or group, rather than having an external group enter the prison for a finite number of interactions with prisoners. Similarly, training probation officers could support them in assessing and supervising probationers and developing comprehensive case management strategies that account for radicalization and disengagement processes. It is important to note, however, that grantees should still anticipate challenges in gaining the buy-in of these alternative populations. For example, when CEP offered to adapt the AP curriculum for prison personnel, it was told that personnel in maximum security sections, where many terrorism-related offenders are housed, could not participate in such a training as they needed to prioritize more urgent needs.

✓ **Build Partnerships with CLS Stakeholders and Institutions.**

Grantees that wish to implement programming in prisons or other CLS institutions should work to build relationships with relevant stakeholders ahead of time to mitigate the challenges in gaining buy-in. DHS should also consider building their own relationships to further support its grant program. Such relationships can be built by connecting with local and state leaders and attending conferences and other events with correctional associations or other relevant professional networks, such as the American Correctional Association, American Jail Association, Association of State Corrections Administrators, and the National Network of Probation Officers. These relationships will help to build trust, increasing chances of gaining buy-in, and help grantees learn about institutions across the United States that might be particularly interested in implementing programming. Prospective grantees would also benefit from engaging partners that have prior experience in CLS implementation in the United States, such as individuals conducting research for the Department of Corrections, and embedding them into their projects. These individuals can provide important insight into CLS institutional structures and administrative concerns when grantees are developing their curriculum and procedures to ensure they are responsive to CLS contexts.

✓ **Communicate the Costs and Benefits of Programming to CLS Institutions.**

Given the resource constraints facing many prisons and other CLS institutions across the United States, it is important that prospective grantees note what resources will be needed to implement their project and consider how, if it all, they can reduce these needs. For example, prison programming typically requires access to a room and staff to accompany inmates for a certain number of hours and days. Projects that work with inmates affiliated with a violent extremist ideology or group may be assigned to restrictive housing, so their participation in programming may require additional prison resources. Grantees should consider if they can mitigate resource needs by being flexible, such as by condensing programming to more hours across fewer days, as CEP offered to do. In addition to costs, grantees should emphasize the benefits that their project can provide. This includes the financial benefits of their project: a DHS-funded TVTP grant can provide programming free of charge to prisons that might otherwise have to pay for programming. While engaging inmates in restrictive housing environments is resource-intensive, free programming within this environment is often a priority for prison administrations. Grantees could also consider offering a financial incentive for participating CLS institutions to mitigate resource needs. For grantees seeking to implement a pilot project, it may also be helpful to emphasize the importance of serving as a pilot site for a new project focused on violent extremism. While some CLS institutions will be hesitant to implement a pilot project that has not yet been tested, grantees can provide a clear explanation of the science that their project is based upon to try to mitigate these concerns.

Regardless of the exact costs and benefits offered by a particular project, grantees may benefit from recruiting prisons or other CLS institutions that do not typically receive attention or requests for programming (e.g., a prison in a rural area), as they may have greater needs or be more receptive.

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