

CLOSEOUT REPORT

***Alternative Pathways: Rehabilitation and Reintegration for Those with
Extremism-Related Convictions***

Award #: EMW-2020-GR-00067

Fiscal year: 2020

Applying entity: Green Light Project, Inc. d.b.a. Counter Extremism Project

Project Overview

On October 1, 2020, the Green Light Project (d.b.a. Counter Extremism Project, CEP) launched *Alternative Pathways: Rehabilitation and Reintegration for Those with Extremism-Related Convictions*. This project, funded by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships, opportunity number DHS-22-TTP-132-00-01, sought to reduce recidivism risks and radicalization amongst those with a conviction for a targeted violence or terrorism-related offense, or to those who become at-risk for terrorism and targeted violence while in correctional facilities by a) developing a curriculum and protocol for release preparation that provides pre- and post-release resources and support to the target population, and b) linking that in-prison course to, and expanding the capacity of, a robust national community-led program that offers post-release reintegration and recidivism reduction services.

To that end, CEP developed a 10-week counter-extremism course appropriate for replication in institutions around the country with national accessibility. The course was designed to be delivered:

- 1) As mail correspondence to 300 inmates convicted of terrorism-related offenses (i.e., individuals convicted of Salafi-jihadism offenses), or with known affiliation to violent extremist groups and ideologies, specifically violent far-right extremist groups (VFRE).¹ Inmates who enrolled in the written correspondence program would also be made aware of the Alternative Pathways post-release program, with the objective of supporting at least 20 at-risk offenders as they transitioned back into society.

¹ To avoid sample selection bias when designing the program, the CEP team also considered including individuals affiliated with left-wing violent groups as potential program participants. However, as per F.B.I. reports, far-left extremism in the United States was most active between the 1960s and 1980s. While it is true that some prominent individuals from this era, such as Weather Underground member David Gilbert and activist Mutulu Shakur were still serving their sentences at the time the program began, they were not contacted for reasons of sample representativity. During the early 2000s, despite the focus on international terrorism and Al-Qaeda, attacks perpetrated by eco-terrorist groups such as the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and Earth Liberation Front (ELF) were considered the primary domestic terrorism threat in what media dubbed the “Green Scare.” The longest sentence given to any of the members of “The Family” (an ecoterrorist cell that committed an estimated \$48 million worth of arson and vandalism across the Pacific Northwest and western U.S. between 1996 and 2001 under the names of the ALF and ELF) was 13 years to Stanislas G. Meyerhoff. Yet, he was released in 2015, according to the BOP inmate locator, and thus the CEP team did not have access to any individuals convicted for ecoterrorism. By 2010 federal authorities had shifted their domestic focus to the threat of the far right, which continued to overshadow the radical far left in violent attacks while ALF and ELF focused on property damage. After the Unite the Right rally (2017), armed groups such as the John Brown Gun Club formed to directly confront the violent far right and a broad interpretation of fascism. In May 2020 after the far left became increasingly visible and destructive during protests against police brutality, then-President Donald Trump called for designating the broad anti-fascist ideology Antifa a terrorist organization. However, the CEP team was not aware of any convictions of individuals affiliated with the violent far left until November 2022. While Alternative Pathways was still running on a no-cost extension at that time, because it was only one case and no other violent far-left extremist had engaged with Alternative Pathways, the CEP team decided to focus its limited resources on trying to gain access to prisons and implement Alternative Pathways in classroom settings.

- 2) As part of a set of at least 4 classes of at least 18 inmates (n=72) at Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility (California). Two classes would be comprised of Muslim inmates at risk for radicalization into Salafi-jihadism, and two classes would be held with participants with previous or current affiliations to violent far-right extremist movements existing outside of prison or far-right extremist prison gangs.

By participating in Alternative Pathways, inmates would increase their awareness of radicalization risk factors, underlying causes, and evidence-based counter-radicalization and self-care practices, while also familiarizing themselves with the Alternative Pathways program and other post-release supports. The course would also be designed to be delivered to violent offenders serving time for crimes other than terrorism (i.e., gang members) in an effort to overcome challenges related to implementation.

Among the Alternative Pathways objectives was to increase the knowledge of extremism and best-practices in re-entry and reintegration amongst those tasked with post-release supervision of inmates with known affiliations to violent extremist movements. Thus, anonymized data gathered from classroom settings, written correspondence courses, and individual reintegration trajectories have served to inform identification of best-practices and research and future training material.

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Alternative Pathways: Program summary

Key accomplishments and Outcomes

- Contacted 165 extremism-related offenders, including individuals serving time for Salafi jihadism-related offenses (n = 97) and individuals affiliated with violent far right extremist (VFRE) movements (n = 68).
- Engaged a total of 68 offenders, 51 Salafi jihadists and 17 VFRE-affiliated individuals.
- Secured the participation of 10 individuals in the Alternative Pathways programs, seven Salafi jihadists and three individuals affiliated with VFRE movements.
- All ten individuals completed the Alternative Pathways course.
- Disseminated the program among five correctional institutions across the country and 21 other relevant stakeholders, including a state Department of Corrections, a magistrate judge, and individuals currently implementing other programs in prisons and jails.
- Received additional referrals from probation officers (n = 1).

Deliverables

- Set up an online portal with the capacity to take referrals and that would host relevant information valuable for those tasked with monitoring extremist offenders in-community: www.4RNetwork.org
- Developed a theory of change (TOC), sent to DHS-CP3 in November 2022 and currently publicly available at <https://4rnetwork.org>
- Designed an Alternative Pathways 10-session workbook and curriculum, sent to DHS-CP3 in November 2022 and currently publicly available at: <https://4rnetwork.org/prison-resources>
- Produced an Alternative Pathways brochure, also sent to DHS-CP3 in June 2023 and that is being disseminated among prospective program participants.
- Organized and held a final Alternative Pathways conference in Washington, D.C., on October 12, 2023, that brought together national and international experts in the field to discuss ongoing efforts in the U.S. and elsewhere to facilitate the safe, healthy, and dignified rehabilitation and reintegration of extremist offenders. The event was attended by a total of 216 people, both in-person and online. The event was recorded and is currently publicly available on [CEP's YouTube channel](#).

Challenges

- Delays associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and the restricted visitation regimes in correctional institutions.
- Delays associated with obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.
- Changes in prison policies in the state of California.
- Skepticism from correctional institutions to implementing pilot programs with no evidence of positive results.
- Bureaucratic procedures associated with accessing correctional institutions.

- Delays in delivering the written correspondence course derived from arduous prison mail requirements.
- Mistrust from prisoners towards the program and reluctance to participate.

Lessons learned

- Skepticism from correctional institutions to implement programs like Alternative Pathways (pilot programs targeting extremist offenders) could be overcome by reducing the size of the target population, managing program expectations or by increasing the capacity of prisons and jails to implement such programs.
- Designing the Alternative Pathways course to be delivered to staff at correctional institutions from the start could have helped the team overcome some of the difficulties in accessing correctional institutions.
- Alternative Pathways would have maybe been more successful if it would have been presented as a violence reduction program rather than a recidivism reduction initiative.
- Any future initiatives that require IRB review would benefit from DHS explaining all details related to IRB processes before the grant period begins, so that TVTP applicants could take this into consideration when drafting their program timelines.
- The CEP team would recommend future applicants to secure the participation of at least two correctional institutions.
- It is crucial that teams attempting to work within the correctional system are open, flexible, and ready to quickly adapt to ever-evolving requirements, independent of whether they come from correctional institutions or other external factors, such as the political climate or other events.
- Fostering communication with DHS-CP3 program managers will result in finding and promoting joint solutions, thus increasing chances of successful implementation.

Sustainability

- CEP's dissemination efforts have resulted in all the Alternative Pathways deliverables being available to individuals outside the U.S.
- The Alternative Pathways workbook, course, and methodology will be replicated in contexts outside the U.S.
- Given the interest expressed by law enforcement and correctional institutions across the U.S., the CEP team will continue to exploit established relationships to try and engage new Alternative Pathways participants.
- Any future efforts will also serve for CEP to continue monitoring and evaluation (M&E) efforts and results will be disseminated appropriately, thus contributing to advancing the field of targeted violence and terrorism prevention.

Alternative Pathways: Key Accomplishments, Challenges, Outcomes and Deliverables.

This section of this closeout report details the key accomplishments, challenges, outcomes and deliverables for Alternative Pathways, a project funded by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (DHS-CP3), opportunity number DHS-22-TTP-132-00-01, that sought to reduce recidivism risks and radicalization amongst those with a conviction for a targeted violence or terrorism related offense, or to those who become at-risk for terrorism and targeted violence while in correctional facilities by a) developing a curriculum and protocol for release preparation that provides pre- and post-release resources and support to the target population, and b) linking that in-prison course to, and expanding the capacity of, a robust national community-led program that offers post-release reintegration and recidivism reduction services.

The closeout report instructions recommended making these sections independent of one another. However, CEP encountered challenges at every stage of the implementation of the program and these impacted the accomplishment of all the project objectives outlined in the original proposal. Thus, in order to explain how each objective was affected by the different challenges encountered and to better illustrate how the attempts to overcome these challenges resulted in different outcomes for each objective area, the CEP team believes it is better to structure the core of this closeout report according to the different intended purposes for this project. Additionally, this structure also allows CEP to better depict how each of the program deliverables are a result of different efforts undertaken to overcome challenges and achieve the intended program goal.

As instructed, this section also includes data included in the final quarterly report, which has been sent to DHS-CP3 along with this report, as well as a summary of some success stories that have resulted from the implementation of Alternative Pathways. Attached to this closeout report is also a copy of the deliverables (where available), except for any data collected through phone conversations with inmates, written correspondence, and answers to the Alternative Pathways workbook exercises. While key data is included in the sections below (see Objective 3), CEP does not want to risk any program participants being potentially identified.

Objective 1: Develop curriculum and protocol.

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

The first objective of the Alternative Pathways program was to develop a tailored curriculum appropriate for the reduction of recidivism risk for terrorism-related offenders. To do so, CEP personnel teamed up with Dr. John Horgan to conduct a systematic review of the literature in multidisciplinary fields of inquiry. The emerging synthesis delivered a guiding theory of change

and logic model to inform the overall project and the effective reintegration of terrorism-related offenders.

Published in November 2022, the Alternative Pathways theory of change is available on the Radicalization, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, and Recidivism Network ([4R Network](#)) website. The 4R Network is a program, also funded by U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships, opportunity number DHS-22-TTP-132-00-01, which seeks to create a national ecosystem of actors bound by common standards to facilitate a whole-of-society approach to extremist offender reintegration and recidivism reduction, and guarantee that every actor tasked with supervising extremist offenders in-prison and/or in-community in the U.S. has adequate knowledge and access to evidence-based support for reintegration.

The purpose of housing Alternative Pathways material under the 4R Network umbrella is two-fold. First, it served to accomplish one of the activities listed in the original implementation plan, i.e., creating a password protected website, transforming the theory of change file into web content, and hosting course and associated material online to facilitate future replication and trainings. Second, it would also help advance recidivism reduction programming for violent extremist offenders by allowing in-prison programs to operate in better conjunction with and support of post-release initiatives and professionals directly and indirectly working to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of extremist offenders.



Figure 1: Alternative Pathways theory of change

The theory of change served to accomplish another of the intended activities of this program: the creation of a framework, curriculum and workbook that would target risk or protective factors identified during the multidisciplinary literature review and while developing the theory of change. As a result, also in November 2022, the Alternative Pathways workbook was published on the [In-Prison Resources section](#) of the 4R Network website. The workbook is a toolkit using a multidisciplinary, evidence-based approach that pulls from diverse perspectives including trauma-informed care, cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing, SMART (Small, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely) planning strategies, mentorship, life coaching and life skills training, countering violent extremism and disengagement and deradicalization-oriented programming, and others; to promote knowledge, skill, self-care, and prosocial development; spiritual and scientific development and empowerment; and the benefits of storytelling.

The workbook pulled from the expertise of Parallel Networks, a 501c3 organization initially directly supported and funded by CEP and a part of CEP as of January 2023, which had developed a holistic set of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) programming comprised of the following intersectional components, all of which provided avenues to support Alternative Pathways program participants:

- **Ctrl+Alt+Del-Hate**—a counter-narrative communication intervention with a protocol for individual and collective change: *Ctrl* – to control the space between stimulus and response; *Alt* – to alter course and address grievances in a nonviolent manner; and *Del-Hate* to recognize that we all have a role to play in combating polarization, hate and extremism.
- **SHIFT-Hate Helpline and Intervention Initiative** (*Support and Help for Individuals and Families Touched by Hate*)—a 24/7 helpline and peer-to-peer intervention service created to assist those impacted by extremist ideologies on a one-on-one basis. Interventionists are comprised of a cadre of former extremists and survivors of extremism, who are supported by a collection of academics and practitioners.
- **SAVE-Hate** (*Society Against Violent Extremism and Hate*)—a network and peer-support group that includes prominent former extremists, survivors of extremism and other activists and professionals working to create a positive network that offers a new community to those impacted by programming.
- **ESC-Hate**—a set of prevention activities focused on resiliency-building, community engagement and education, including a bi-weekly podcast, book club, and public presentations for houses of worship, institutions, and government agencies.

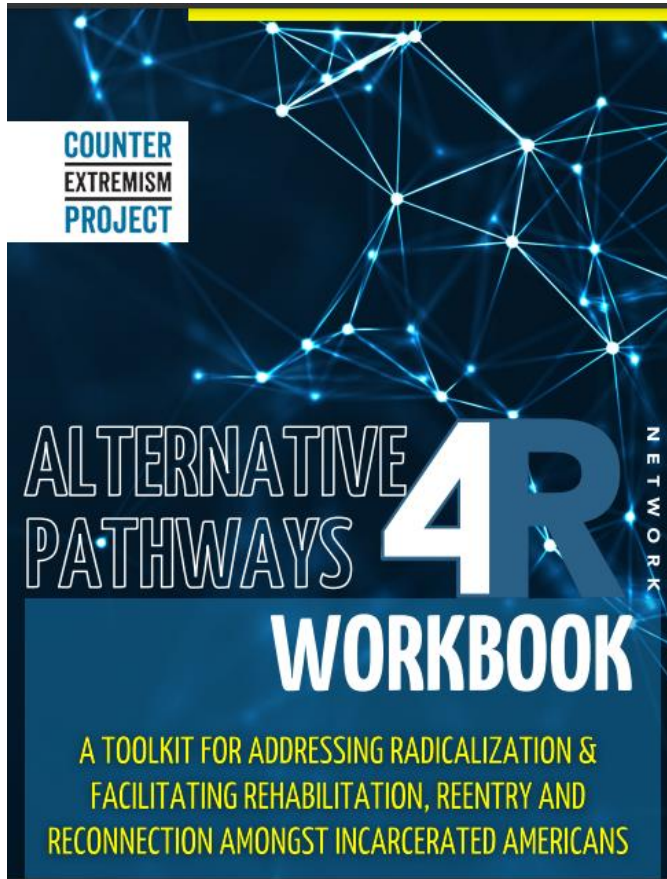


Figure 2: Alternative Pathways workbook cover

To develop the curriculum and workbook, the CEP team worked with Choice Resource, a set of professional correctional rehabilitation service providers that offer programming at California State Prison-Los Angeles County by incorporating moral reform and character development mechanisms through the study of spiritual teachings.

Originally, the Alternative Pathways team intended to design two new and distinct curricula, one appropriate for jihadist terrorism-related offenders and another for far-right and targeted violence communities. The intent was for each lesson to cover the same content for both target groups, but the content would be framed in a culturally appropriate manner for each group. Ultimately, however, because the Alternative Pathways lessons would be a large component of the project’s monitoring and evaluation efforts, the CEP

team decided to develop one single curriculum that could be adapted to fit the worldview of both groups.

As the curriculum was being developed, two other activities were occurring simultaneously. On the one hand, the CEP team and Dr. Horgan developed the pre- and post-testing for the curriculum and course and the materials were submitted to an Institutional Review Board (IRB). On the other hand, the CEP team also prepared a reentry guide and community-resource directory for reintegrating inmates which promoted post-release services and included self-care mechanisms and advice for prosocial engagement. Hard copies of both the reentry guide and the Alternative Pathways workbook were printed while the IRB reviewed all materials submitted.

Objective 2: Deliver curriculum in-prison to reduce risks of in-prison radicalization.

- **Outcome 2.1.:** At least 72 inmates’ awareness of radicalization risk factors, underlying causes and evidence-based counter-radicalization and self-care practices increases.
- **Outcome 2.2.:** At least 72 inmates made aware of Alternative Pathways program and other post-release supports.

After designing the curriculum, the CEP team was supposed to deliver it in-person in in-prison settings to test its value as a pre-release reentry and reintegration preparation course tailored for the risk associated with terrorism-related offenders.

Initially, the delivery of the in-person sessions was supposed to take place between March and September 2021. Choice Resources instructors, who had been trained by the CEP team in the content of the theory of change, as well as the curriculum and course workbooks' exercises and evaluation, would deliver the 10-week Alternative Pathways curriculum to at least four classes of at least 18 inmates in California prisons over the grant period. At the end of each session, instructors would administer anonymized pre- and post-testing to gauge the effectiveness of each module, and an anonymized satisfaction survey that would enable the team to assess attitudinal alterations as the lessons unfolded. Reporting and progress notes and evaluation material would then be forwarded to the CEP team, who would use this information to monitor progress and provide input after each course for further instruction and to arrange the data so that it could be utilized to analyze project and early outcomes. However, a series of setbacks prevented CEP from accomplishing these activities and thus fulfilling this second objective.

- IRB review

The first challenge experienced by CEP was delays in the timeline caused by the IRB process. Alternative Pathways sought to engage inmates, a protected population, and thus required a full IRB review. However, the third-party IRB did not give final approval on the implementation of the curriculum and inmate outreach material until January 2022, that is, 15 months into a 24-month grant period. This caused delays related both when it came to contacting inmates who would enroll in the written correspondence course and difficulties in coordinating classes with Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility. Coordinating classes was also complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences.

- COVID-19 pandemic

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a series of lockdowns mitigating the spread of the pandemic in the United States were introduced beginning in March and maintained into July of 2020, when the first wave of the pandemic was largely believed to have passed. These measures also affected the visitation regimes within the prison systems.

Correctional institutions across the country made plans consistent with their institutional resources (including physical space) and continuously monitored their visiting plans and made other modifications to effectively manage COVID-19 and maintain the safety of staff, inmates, visitors, and communities, including suspended, limited, or postponed visitations and providing visitations by appointment. When and where visitations were possible, visits had to be non-contact, and social distance between inmates and visitors

was enforced. This new regime affected the Alternative Pathways team’s ability to deliver the in-person courses until late 2021.

Additionally, the pandemic brought about effects specifically in the California prison system that directly impacted the ability of the Alternative Pathways teams to accomplish the second objective of the program. Since 2011, the state of California has passed several reforms to reduce its prison population. The COVID-19 pandemic furthered a trend of decarceration, as California reduced prison and jail populations to slow the spread of the virus.

These measures reduced the correctional population more severely than any of the state’s prior decarceration reforms. For example, the number of adults incarcerated by the state of California in 2007 exceeded 173,000; by June 2020 – following years of criminal justice reforms and policies adopted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic – the number of incarcerated adults had dropped by more than one-third, to 113,403, and to 103,169 in August of that same year.² Consequentially, due to the ongoing decline in the prison population, California sought to end the use of all in-state contract facilities for men, as well as the closing of several state prisons.³

These reforms following the COVID-19 pandemic, among other factors, also negatively impacted the willingness of correctional facilities to participate in the Alternative Pathways program.

- Engagement of correctional institutions

As outlined in the original proposal, the Alternative Pathways team was supposed to coordinate with Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility (RJDCF) to deliver the workbook and curriculum 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.

In conjunction with the Choice Resources team, CEP engaged in conversations with the mental health services department at the state prison. Following conversations among all parties:

² Scott Graves, “Criminal Justice Reform Is Working in California,” California Budget and Policy Center, August 2020, <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/criminal-justice-reform-is-working-in-california/>

³ “Reduction/Closure Information,” California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, [https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/prison-closures/#:~:text=The%20first%20prison%2C%20Deuel%20Vocational,\(CVSP\)%20by%20March%202025;](https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/prison-closures/#:~:text=The%20first%20prison%2C%20Deuel%20Vocational,(CVSP)%20by%20March%202025;) “Prison closure, facility deactivations,” California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, December 12, 2022, <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/insidecdcr/2022/12/12/prison-closure-and-facility-deactivations/>

- ❖ The CEP team modified the selection criteria for course participants. Given that getting the necessary permissions and access to high-risk offenders would cause even further delays in the implementation of the program, CEP determined that any offender would be welcome to participate. Because of the risk posed by in-prison gangs, including VFRE gangs, in prisons and jails across the country, the team concluded that any inmate could be susceptible to radicalization. Plus, increasing the pool of program participants could serve to advance M&E activities, by allowing results obtained from the general inmate population and those gathered directly from terrorism- or extremism-related convicts to be compared.
- ❖ The Alternative Pathways team designed recruitment (marketing) materials for the in-person courses both in English and Spanish. These materials would be publicized through the mental health services office at the facility. Given the number of inmates that made use of such services, including inmates preparing for release, would ensure maximum dissemination of the initiative.
- ❖ Modified the structure of the lessons to fit the availability of RJDCF personnel. While the course was originally designed to be delivered over a period of ten weeks (one session per week), it was agreed that the team would be able to deliver two sessions each week, thus reducing the implementation period to five weeks.
- ❖ The Alternative Pathways team agreed to target inmates in different modules, to meet RJDCF's non-discrimination policies. This would also benefit M&E activities, since it would allow the team to compare results and responses gathered from inmates convicted for crimes of different natures.

However, the effects of COVID-19 and the effects of the subsequent decarceration policies on an already understaffed institution⁴ also negatively impacted efforts by the Alternative Pathways team. After four months of conversations and planning, it was determined that RJDCF could not allocate staff to supervise the development of the in-person courses. In order to be able to operate independently within the facility, the Choice Resources trainers would have to obtain a special permit, known as a “brown card,” that would enable them to deliver the sessions without the supervision of prison staff.

This caused further delays in the delivery of the course. In the meantime, internal restructuring occurred within RJDCF which ultimately caused the facility to decline their participation in the program. To fulfill all program requirements, the CEP team undertook extensive efforts to identify and recruit correctional institutions that would participate in

⁴ Associated Press, “Sources: Staffing shortage at California federal prison hampered response to suicide,” The Mercury News, May 27, 2021, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2021/05/27/ap-sources-staffing-hampered-response-to-prison-suicide/>

the Alternative Pathways initiative and to adapt to those institutions' needs and contexts, including communicating with seven prisons across the U.S. (five in California, one in New York, one in Washington, DC).

In this regard, the CEP team also faced a series of challenges that ultimately prevented the delivery of the Alternative Pathways in-person course, mainly:

- ❖ The lack of clear channels for contacting prisons that may be interested in participating in such programming. Despite CEP contacting various institutions and stakeholders, in addition to numerous contacts provided by DHS CP3, none of the facilities had requested or even considered programming specifically targeting extremism-related offenders.
- ❖ Understaffing and extensive bureaucratic procedures in correctional facilities across the U.S. resulted in further delays in implementing, as CEP was dependent on responses or approval from prison staff before advancing on the final approval process. Oftentimes during this process, the CEP team found that programs needed approval from both prison management and political actors, including state governors, who were unwilling to commit scarce resources to a tiny percentage of the prison population.
- ❖ While a lot of the communications with correctional facilities initially proved positive, the correctional facilities that CEP reached out to ultimately declined participation in what is, essentially, a pilot intervention initiative that had not yet been tested and/or proved positive results.

Despite all these challenges, the CEP team proactively continued to seek new opportunities to implement the Alternative Pathways program in a prison system. To that end, the CEP team:

- Modified the Alternative Pathways curriculum content.
Following a positive lead from a prison in the state of New York, and in an effort to adapt to the institutional needs and context, the CEP team modified the content of the Alternative Pathways workbook. While the core of the curriculum was respected, the content was tailored to target violent offenders and gang members. The adapted curriculum received IRB approval but was ultimately not utilized during the grant period. In this case, the target population was seen as being too risky to undergo an untested, pilot program.

This prison indicated that it had previously had success with courses that took a “train-the-trainer” or mentorship approach. Under this approach, and following the prison’s request, the Alternative Pathways course was modified so that it could be delivered to a smaller group of individuals (e.g., 10–15) who would pass the knowledge and skills garnered during the in-person session to other inmates, thus acting as unofficial mentors.

- Explored modifying the target population of the program.

The CEP team held conversations with stakeholders in the state of California to explore the possibility of administering the Alternative Pathways curriculum to prison staff working with high-risk offenders, including individuals convicted for extremism-related offenses. This approach would indeed prevent the team from working with the target population directly, yet it would accomplish the overall objective of reducing recidivism risks and radicalization amongst those with a conviction for a targeted violence or terrorism related offense, or to those who become at-risk for terrorism and targeted violence while in correctional facilities while also reducing the risks associated with prison bureaucracy and obtaining the necessary permits to access the target groups.

However, these attempts were ultimately unsuccessful once again because of understaffing reasons (and the inability of personnel to dedicate time to the courses during their working hours) and the risks associated with working with extremism-related offenders. Additionally, authorities in California claimed that staff working in prison modules where high-risk offenders were housed (including extremist offenders) would not be particularly interested in trainings like the ones offered by the CEP team. The reason for this is that the high rate of incidents between prisoners prevented guards and other staff from being able to focus on long-term activities such as rehabilitation and reintegration and would rather focus on the short-term goal of ensuring safety of inmates and the rest of the staff.

- Engaged in extensive dissemination activities.

On top of reaching out to several correctional institutions across the country, CEP held conversations, sent information, and provided presentations to 21 relevant stakeholders, including a state Department of Corrections, a magistrate judge, individuals currently implementing other programs in prisons and jails, and the California Prevention Practitioners Network, among others. CEP also presented the 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.

Despite these efforts, the Alternative Pathways team did not ultimately manage to accomplish Objective 2 of the program. Consequently, no information on the Alternative Pathways post-release support services was provided to inmates in-person. Nonetheless, engagement efforts did lead CEP to establish relationships with law enforcement officials across the country, specifically probation officers, who directed their probationers to the CEP staff and the Alternative Pathways program. While none of the probationers have yet completed the ten-lesson workbook, it is allowing for the CEP team to carefully monitor individual trajectories of extremist offenders as they return to society, thus advancing the general knowledge on

extremism and promising practices in re-entry and reintegration. Additionally, comparing these results and experiences to those who accomplished the Alternative Pathways course while incarcerated is allowing the team to continue to monitor and evaluate differences in resocialization experiences and, thus, the effectiveness of both the curriculum and the services delivered.

Objective 3: Deliver the curriculum as a written correspondence course to incarcerated terrorism-related offenders or those with known affiliations to extremist movements and ideologies.

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

As the Alternative Pathways team waited for the IRB process to be resolved, CEP started working towards the completion of Objective 3 of the project. To that end, the CEP team started simultaneously coordinating the Alternative Pathways course material so that it could be arranged as a mail correspondence course and identifying incarcerated terrorism-related offenders or those with known affiliations to extremist movements and ideologies.

To identify these individuals, the team used different sources depending on the nature of the offense (jihadism offenses vs. individuals affiliated to VFRE movements). To identify jihadism-related offenders, the CEP team referred to the New America Foundations' Terrorism in America After 9/11 database,⁵ and George Washington University Program on Extremism's (GWUPOE) ISIS in America database.⁶ In the case of VFRE-affiliated individuals, the team initially resorted to two websites which are no longer available: The Global Minority Initiative and First Vigil. Both sites contained information on individuals supportive of violent right-wing extremism who were now serving time for a variety of offenses, ranging from firearms violations to battery and assault and domestic violence. After January 6, 2021, the CEP team also resorted to GWUPOE's database of Capitol Hill Siege Cases to identify individuals who could also qualify for participating in the

⁵ Bergen, Peter, and David Sterman. Terrorism in America After 9/11. Washington, D.C.: New America Foundation, last updated on December 15, 2023. <https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/reports/terrorism-in-america/>; Bergen, Peter, and David Sterman. Terrorism in America After 9/11: Who are the Terrorists?. Washington, D.C.: New America Foundation, last updated on December 15, 2023. <https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/terrorism-in-america/who-are-terrorists/>

⁶ GW Program on Extremism. The Cases. Washington, D.C.: George Washington University. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/cases>

Alternative Pathways program.⁷ Throughout the duration of the project, the CEP team also tracked convictions of individuals through Department of Justice publications.

The objective was to identify and reach out through letters sent via the postal system to 300 individual terrorism-related offenders or individuals with known affiliation to violent extremist movements to both make them aware of the Alternative Pathways program and requesting their participation in completing the written correspondence course. While initially the team had identified the intended number of individuals (n= 300) the significant delays in obtaining IRB approval prevented CEP from contacting some of the individuals identified prior to the approval because they had completed their sentences (n =10), had been extradited to their countries of origin (n =8), were deceased (n = 3), or were no longer traceable using the Bureau of Prisons Inmate Locator system (n= 7). Consequently, by the end of the project (September 30, 2023), the CEP team had only been able to identify 295 individuals. Of those individuals, 61% (n= 180) had been convicted for offenses related to Salafi jihadism, whilst 39% of them (n= 115) were affiliated to VFRE groups or ideologies.

The reason for this disparity in sample sizes responds to three reasons:

- 1) Nature of the convictions: The overwhelming majority of terrorism-related convictions in the United States are related to international terrorism charges, specifically crimes related to Salafi-jihadist groups.
- 2) Publicly available information: Individuals identified as being affiliated with VFRE groups were not convicted for terrorism-related offenses but for other crimes (firearms violations, drug-related offenses, domestic violence, etc.). Unless the affiliation to a given group is publicly available information and can be found in public documents such as press articles, court documents, or open-source databases, it isn't easy to identify such cases.
- 3) Sentencing duration: Because sentences of individuals affiliated with VFRE groups are not related to terrorism, they are also shorter, thus reducing the sample size of currently incarcerated individuals.

Of the 295 inmates, CEP ultimately managed to contact 165 inmates (62% of those identified). Among those identified, 58.8% (n= 97) had been convicted for offenses related to Salafi jihadism, and 41.2% of them (n= 68) were affiliated to VFRE groups or ideologies. CEP defines “contact” as successfully managing to get the letters to incarcerated individuals. This definition was chosen because, despite CEP reaching out to the 295 identified individuals, on several occasions the physical letter was sent back to the team mainly due to letters not complying with the facility requirements (specifically, the color of the envelope) or because inmates had been transferred to a

⁷ GW Program on Extremism. Capitol Hill Siege Cases. Washington, D.C.: George Washington University. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/capitol-hill-siege-cases>

different facility. Based on earlier efforts,⁸ the CEP team expected a response rate of around 25%. As expected, the CEP team managed to engage 68 individuals (23%). Of those whom the CEP team managed to engage with, 51 of them (75%) had been convicted for Salafi jihadism-related offenses and 17 of them (25%) were affiliated to VFRE groups or ideologies.

By establishing written correspondence with extremism-related offenders the CEP team intended to gain the commitment of those willing to complete the course. However, CEP's activities were not limited to sending lessons to offenders so that they could complete them on their own. Rather, the team also held conversations with offenders via e-mail and telephone to assist them in the process. The purpose was to establish sufficient rapport and trust with inmates so that correspondence would continue throughout the duration of their sentence,⁹ and to engage participants in the Alternative Pathways post-release, in-community reintegration program. Upon returning to society, the CEP team would utilize resources to facilitate case management and counter-radicalization release support services, including former extremists, survivors of extremism, or mental health/human service staff as interventionists.

Yet, establishing trust indeed stood out as being one of the key elements to the success of the program. Many inmates were reluctant to take part in a program that was offered to them by an unknown organization and often thought of the program as being a tool from government officials to garner information on them to further incriminate them. To overcome this hurdle, the CEP team took three clear steps:

- Request a branding waiver.
Initial outreach to inmates revealed a lack of trust in all government-funded programs and, consequently, an unwillingness to partake in the Alternative Pathways initiatives. To encourage preliminary conversations with the target population, the CEP team requested the DHS-CP3 team for a branding waiver to remove any specific reference to government funding both from the original outreach letter and from the Alternative Pathways workbook. This, however, did not imply the CEP team did not disclose the funding sources for Alternative Pathways. Rather, this information was revealed to inmates who had successfully engaged in the program.
- Dedicate a substantial amount of time to establishing trust with inmates prior to securing their voluntary participation in the course.
Many of the initial conversations revolved around establishing a personalized relationship with the inmate in question. CEP defines “personalized relationship” as familiarizing themselves with the inmates’ case (as expressed by inmates themselves), as well as

⁸ The Alternative Pathways program had been operating without government funding since 2018.

⁹ All inmates selected for participation in the Alternative Pathways program were set for release within the next five years.

gathering information on the different areas outlined in the TOC, i.e., mental health, psychosocial support networks (including friends and family members they maintained contact with), and employment and/or educational prospects and desires upon release. While this undoubtedly caused delays in the delivery and completion of the Alternative Pathways program, it increased the rates of voluntary participation in the written correspondence course and in the post-release support initiative.

- Avoid explicit indications of project monitoring and evaluation.
 In relation to establishing trust with inmates, the CEP team purposefully avoided utilizing pre- and post-testing, qualitative questionnaires, and open-ended interviews to evaluate impact of the Alternative Pathways written correspondence course. Rather, following a case management model, the CEP team utilized written correspondence (letters and emails) and conversations held over the phone to track progress and (perceived) challenges in all areas highlighted in the TOC, as well as opinions and thoughts on the course content.

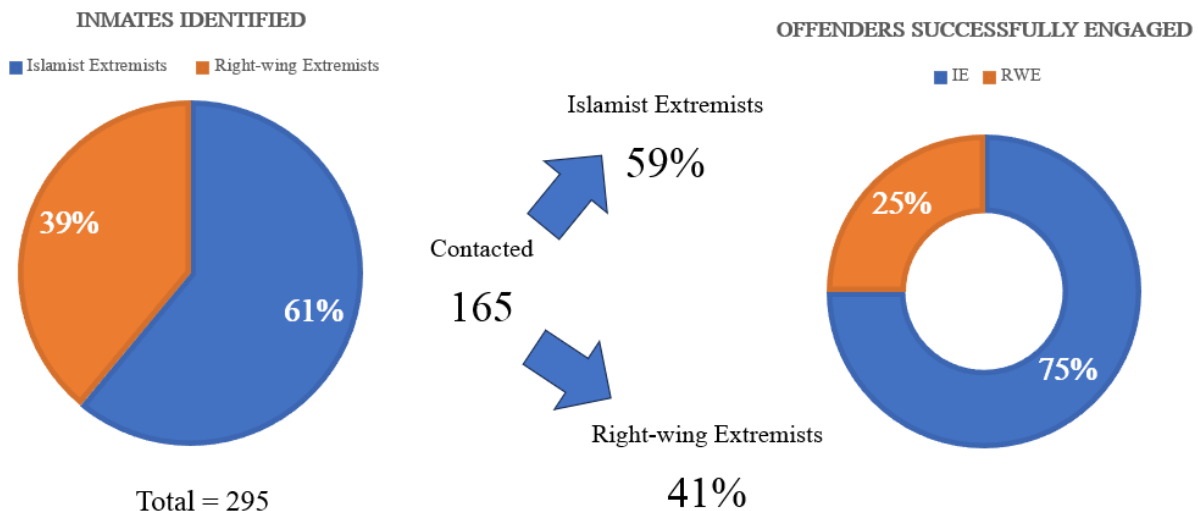


Figure 3: Alternative Pathways written correspondence course in numbers.

Ultimately, a total of 10 inmates (15% of those engaged with, 6% of those contacted) completed the Alternative Pathways written correspondence course, a result consistent with the metrics outlined in the original implementation and monitoring plan (IMP). It is worth noting that 100% of those who participated in the Alternative Pathways program were males. Seven of them were affiliated with a Salafi-jihadist ideology or group, and three were affiliated with a VFRE ideology or group. Of those who completed the course, eight individuals were released from incarceration during the duration of the program, only two of whom were affiliated with a VFRE ideology or group. The CEP team has worked with all eight individuals to formulate a post-release plan.

However, only three of them have successfully completed the intervention plan.¹⁰ The main reasons for these results are:

- Difficult access to mental health services.

Except for the cases in which mental health treatment was court mandated as part of the conditions of supervised release, there were two main reasons why inmates did not get mental health support services.

First is the poor coverage of insurance policies and high costs associated with finding a good therapist. In this regard, the CEP team tried connecting Alternative Pathways participants to licensed mental health professionals that were also familiar with the nuances of radicalization processes and could act as interventionists. However, the CEP team ran into two main limitations, mainly inmates deprioritizing mental health in favor of what they considered to be more urgent needs (such as looking for housing and employment) and the difficulty in connecting with probation officers to get approval for these services. In this regard, the CEP team was completely dependent on inmates to provide the contact information of their probation officers (POs). However, likely due to trust issues and the recurring idea that receiving mental health treatment would portray them in a negative light, inmates were not keen on providing their PO's contact information.

Second, and in relation to the above, the CEP team also identified substantial stigma associated with receiving services from mental health professionals. Rather, inmates were more willing to receive spiritual counselling from religious leaders. In this regard, the CEP team connected willing releasees to informal counselling services spearheaded by former extremists and interventionists with an expertise in extremist ideologies. In this regard, connections to interventionists were more successful than engagements with former extremists.

- Poor family relations.

As noted in CEP's theory of change, positive family relations can play an important role in reducing recidivism rates among offenders returning to the community. However, familial support was not consistent among all program participants. In fact, among those who engaged in the Alternative Pathways program,

- ❖ Four out of ten had lost all family connections after their arrest and conviction.
- ❖ Three out of ten had gradually improved their relationship with their family during their incarceration. In this regard, it is worth noting that improved family relations did not include all immediate family members (i.e., parents, siblings, and

¹⁰ The CEP team defines "successful completion" as the ability of inmates to engage in all priority areas identified in the theory of change.

grandparents), but rather only improved relationships with certain family members. Specifically, two individuals improved relationships with their mother and sister, whilst one of the program participants improved their relationship with their father.

- ❖ Two out of ten, all of whom had been incarcerated before they turned 20, were able to maintain family ties throughout the duration of their incarceration.
- ❖ One out of the ten individuals resorted to an old family friend, specifically a friend of their father, to fulfill that familial role during incarceration and post-release.

The CEP team did not manage to engage with the family members of Alternative Pathways participants. Thus, we cannot provide any first-hand explanations as to why family members decided to cut ties, maintain relationships, or improve familial ties.

- Criminal records and conditions of supervised release.

According to Alternative Pathways participants, the conditions of their supervised release and having a criminal record negatively impacted their ability to:

- ❖ Secure independent housing: All Alternative Pathways participants were required to live in a halfway house. Although their placement in transitional housing was dependent on the nature of their offense, a requirement of their supervised release as they transitioned into the community and being contingent upon the availability of residential reentry centers, program participants mentioned that this prevented them from living close to family members, fulfilling jobs, and to live in communities where they felt safe and secure. In addition, the fact that their freedom of movement was limited by the conditions of their supervised release and that they would need a background check going forward when looking for housing, limited their ability to live independently.
- ❖ Pursue educational opportunities: Fifty percent of program participants expressed their desire to pursue higher education upon release. However, because many colleges in the United States perform background checks on prospective students to meet the requirements of affiliation agreements, they felt that their opportunities to achieve their prospects would be diminished to the point that only two individuals decided to follow this path. Moreover, the fact that the conditions of supervised release often required program participants to secure employment also reportedly pushed them to comply with these conditions and look for a job rather than continuing their education.
- ❖ Gain financial independence through fulfilling employment: Because of their offense, program participants who managed to obtain employment within the first month of their release (n = 5) expressed their dissatisfaction with their employment conditions. Four of them argued that their only options for

employment were manual labor, low-paying jobs, while one of them wanted to be self-employed and “be his own boss.”

- Stigma.

All Alternative Pathways participants highlighted how the nature of their offense caused them to be excessively stigmatized. In their own words, stigma translated into:

- ❖ Excessive restrictions to their freedom of movement, particularly when it implied moving to areas outside the jurisdiction of their assigned PO.
- ❖ Halfway houses not wanting to host terrorism-related offenders, thus complicating their return to society.
- ❖ Limitations in their communications when family members were overseas.¹¹

Once again, this information is based solely on commentary provided by Alternative Pathways participants. The CEP team was unable to substantiate the veracity of these claims, since there was no way of talking to prospective employers, managers of halfway houses, or probation officers.

Lastly, and in relation to matters of mental health and psychosocial support, a total of eight program participants also expressed that the nature of their offense prevented them from establishing positive social connections with other members of the community. Mainly, program participants argue that talking about their case with new acquaintances, or acquaintances finding out about their criminal history, would prevent them from establishing any meaningful relationships with new individuals.

To overcome some of these limitations, the CEP team tried contacting the POs of those involved in the Alternative Pathways post-release, in-community support initiative. However, as mentioned above, the team was not particularly successful in achieving this objective. At the time of writing this report, CEP is engaged with two probation officers. Both were made aware of the Alternative Pathways program through CEP’s dissemination efforts. While one of them was, coincidentally, already working with one of the program participants, the other referred one of his parolees to the Alternative Pathways team once he had volunteered to take part in the initiative.

Finally, fulfilling this third objective also required the CEP team to coordinate and publish a resource guide with directory and promotion of Alternative Pathways post-release services for distribution to inmates in the target population. Ultimately, however, the CEP team opted for publishing a pamphlet that summarizes the services that individuals could have access to were they to engage in the program. As it turns out, Alternative Pathways participants were distributed across

¹¹ To establish communications with family members who are overseas implies using inexpensive internet communication applications such as Skype or WhatsApp. However, use of these applications is restricted when parolees are not allowed to use the internet as part of the conditions of their supervised release.

the United States, and their needs and conditions of supervised release varied on a case-by-case basis. Thus, producing a one-size-fits all resource guide would have been detrimental to the goal of securing volunteer participation of inmates in the program based on the premise that post-release services would be tailored to their individual case.



Figure 4: Alternative Pathways brochure

Objective 4: Research Component and Delivery of Training to Stakeholders

- **Outcome 4.1.:** Knowledge of extremism and best-practices in re-entry and reintegration amongst those tasked with post-release supervision of inmates with known affiliations to violent extremist movements increases.

As part of the program objectives, the CEP team was supposed to gather, analyze, and interpret all program results. These findings would then be incorporated into a final report that documented project results, key findings, and recommendations. Additionally, the key findings of the report would be condensed into short briefs with visual representation of results and findings.

These activities were never accomplished due to two main reasons, both interrelated. The first is the inability of the team to access correctional institutions and complete Objective 2. The team's inability to conduct M&E activities with inmates to whom the curriculum was delivered in person not only reduced the availability of valid results to verify the effectiveness of the curriculum, but it also prevented the team from comparing the results to those of inmates who completed the program via the written correspondence course. However, as mentioned, trust issues among inmates led the CEP team to not issue surveys that could serve for M&E purposes. Additionally, had the team actually issued such surveys among those who completed the course via written correspondence, there were only 10 individuals who completed the course in this manner. Thus, the sample size is too small for them to be representative of the broader target population.

This does not imply, however, that the CEP team could not utilize the preliminary findings to create content for interactive workshop/training modalities for in-person and online participation. Aside from the dissemination efforts conducted under Objective 2, the team is currently preparing a series of online workshops that will be delivered as part of the 4R Network General Knowledge sessions (see Objective 1). Additionally, CEP also organized a full-day, in-person event to inform the broader public on the project and its preliminary results and inform policymakers and other relevant stakeholders on issues relevant to the rehabilitation and reintegration of extremist offenders both in the U.S. and elsewhere.



The *Alternative Pathways: Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Extremist Offenders* conference took place at the National Press Club (Washington, D.C.) on October 12, 2023, and brought together both national and international experts in the field to discuss ongoing efforts in the U.S. to facilitate the safe, healthy, and dignified rehabilitation and reintegration of extremist offenders. Participants also discussed what policymakers, security officials, and practitioners could learn from promising practices in other contexts.

The event was held in hybrid modality, that is, attendees could take part in the event both in-person and online. A total of 216 people participated in the event. Of those, 76 people attended the event in person, and the rest attended online. Regarding the online attendance numbers, the breakdown of attendance statistics is as follows:

- 73 Unique Viewers (Each person, counted only once, who viewed webcast on their computer. Excludes panelists/attendees who only listened on their phone).
- 140 Total Users (All panelist and attendee count).
- 41 Max Concurrent Views (Maximum # of online viewers at the same time, excludes panelists).

Figure 5: *Alternative Pathways conference program*

As is further detailed in the Next Steps section below, the Alternative Pathways conference allowed for CEP to:

- Connect with law enforcement stakeholders to discuss the possibility of delivering training for their workforce and enhance their knowledge on how to best contribute to rehabilitating and reintegrating extremist offenders.
- Connect with probation officers who eventually connected parolees under their supervision to the Alternative Pathways team.

Success stories

Despite the challenges encountered, there are positive stories that took place while implementing the Alternative Pathways program.

Promoting family cohesion

One of the priority areas outlined in the Alternative Pathways theory of change included promoting family cohesion. Thus, because of the inherent social component to reintegration, Alternative Pathways focused on preserving, and support for, the family unit,¹² and focused on making program participants aware of the healthy role extended family members can play in the rehabilitation and reintegration process and how they might provide support, while also looking at potential bad actors in an extended family that may serve as a hindrance to the reintegration process. In that regard, the CEP team believes that there are two stories that are worth highlighting.

One of the Alternative Pathways participants (P1), affiliated with a VFRE movement, had been working with one of the interventionists for two months when he first started talking about his family relations. His parents had separated and divorced when he was very young. After the divorce, he stayed with his mother, who eventually got into a new relationship, a man he did not get along with. As a result, his relationship with his mother was negatively impacted. However, moving in with his father was not an option, since he'd lost contact with him over the years.

Once sentenced and incarcerated, P1 had received a letter from his estranged father. His father told him he had read about his case in the newspaper and was willing to repair the relationship with his son. He also provided his contact information and asked his son to call him. However, resentment had prevented P1 from reaching back out to his father. While he did not blame his father for his involvement in VFRE, he did believe that not having any positive male role model in his life, "somebody who taught him how to be a real man," had contributed to him having anger issues that had manifested in the form of antisocial behaviors.

The Alternative Pathways interventionist took this opportunity to discuss with P1 what he would have liked the relationship with his father to be like, what things he believed could be changed in the relationship with his father (and which ones couldn't) and based on this, whether he believed that working on the relationship with his father was worthwhile. During the next call, P1 mentioned that he had reached out to his father and that they had had a preliminary conversation. As months went on, the occasional conversations with his father became steadier. Ultimately, as P1 prepared for release, P1's father became the person that became key in the resocialization process. For instance, after his time at the halfway house was over, his father (who coincidentally was now

¹² For the purpose of the Alternative Pathways project, CEP used an extended definition of family that includes siblings and extended family, romantic partners, and those in the community that may fulfill a familial role.

living in the same jurisdiction in which P1 had to stay because of the conditions of his supervised released) had offered to allow P1 to move in with him if P1 needed it.

Another Alternative Pathways participant (P2), convicted of terrorism offenses related to Salafi jihadism, had been working with his assigned interventionist for over a year when his mother fell ill. P2 had grown up in a single parent household and spoke of his childhood fondly. In fact, he often described his mother as, “the best and most compassionate women in the world.” However, he did believe that his involvement in terrorist activities had negatively impacted their relationship. Specifically, he believed that his mother’s recent health issues were a result of the stress his arrest and conviction had put on her. He often expressed feelings of remorse and regret.

One day, P2 called the Alternative Pathways interventionist in distress. He had been trying to reach his mother from prison, but she was not picking the phone up at home. Knowing how important P2’s relationship with his mother was to him, the Alternative Pathways interventionist offered to try and help contacting P2’s mother. After several attempts, the interventionist was able to get a hold of P2’s mother’s boyfriend, who explained that she was in the hospital for her health issues. Once the news was communicated to P2, he became incredibly anxious; and ruminating on thoughts of his mother passing away while he was incarcerated started taking him over.

During the three weeks that P2’s mother was being treated in the hospital, the Alternative Pathways interventionist managed the communications between the two. Specifically, the interventionist would contact P2’s mother or her partner directly at the hospital room and would then relay any messages and updates to P2, who would, in return, send messages to his mother through the Alternative Pathways interventionist. Once his mother left the hospital, P2 confessed to his interventionist, “I feel like I finally understand the importance of relationships with one’s mother beyond financial support and housing. This really made a difference, thank you.¹³”

Advancing educational and economic capital

Efforts conducted under the Alternative Pathways program focused on advancing social, educational, and economic capital for extremist offenders and those susceptible to radicalization in prison settings to fulfill unmet needs, construct positive narratives, and to establish connection to prosocial networks that enhance quality of life, facilitate meaningful resocialization, and reduce recidivism risks. As mentioned, conversations with program participants often touched upon the expectations and hopes that they had upon release.

¹³ The comment occurred in the context of P2 expressing how he felt that staff at the correctional institution where he was being housed were not understanding how anxiety-inducing his mother’s illness was, and how he would have appreciated the possibility of going to visit his mother or at least having had more support from the institution staff when trying to contact her.

One of the Alternative Pathways participants had expressed his desire to be financially independent. However, he knew that his conviction would probably prevent him from getting a job that would earn him more than minimum wage. Thus, he openly expressed the idea of becoming self-employed and turning his interests into a business. However, he had never gone to business school, and he also felt that his conviction would also prevent him from getting into any school that would provide him with the necessary education.

One of the solutions that the Alternative Pathways team came up with was encouraging the program participant to benefit from the positive relationship he had with his family members to get some books sent to prison that would allow him to design a business plan that he then sent to his interventionist. The Alternative Pathways team then utilized their connections to find a business expert to provide tips that would allow him to continue to perfect his plan and stay motivated as he also prepared for release.

Upon release, the Alternative Pathways program participant continued communicating with the interventionist and updated them with the next steps on his business. At the time of writing this report, it seems that, after leaving the halfway house and having settled back into his family home, he has submitted the application at a bank to receive a loan that would allow him to start his own business. Among the documents submitted is the business plan that he had begun while incarcerated and that he has continued to work on over the past months.

Similarly, another of the Alternative Pathways program participants, younger in age, had vehemently expressed his desire to complete his education, a process that was hampered after his arrest. In this case, the Alternative Pathways team worked with him and his family to identify community colleges close to the area where he would be living, because of the conditions of his supervised release, and that would allow him to complete his education.

Because he had completed the Alternative Pathways program, the team had sufficient evidence of his change in mindset and behaviors to write a letter of support to the college board with the reasons why he should be admitted to his program of choice. At the time of writing this report, he is currently completing his education and is looking forward to continuing his higher education. He also claims to have made friends in college and is expanding his social circle with individuals who seem to be having a positive influence on him.

Framing the context appropriately and reducing stigmatization

With regard to the Alternative Pathways course itself, one of the individuals who completed the program explained how the workbook and the narrative therapy exercises had helped him post-release when it came to explaining his trajectory to individuals.

Specifically, he mentioned how he felt his therapist was a little bit skeptical of him. She had never made any deprecating or harmful comments, but “it’s the vibe that she gives me, I think I make

her uncomfortable because of what I did. She just doesn't want to say it, I get that." However, this situation seemingly changed for the better when he decided to sit down and review the Alternative Pathways exercises that he had completed while incarcerated. During the next session with his therapist, he was reportedly able to explain his background and his current state of mind to his therapist in a manner that was more productive and it made it easier for her to understand him.

Lessons Learned

There are several lessons to be drawn from the challenges encountered during the implementation of Alternative Pathways.

The need to overcome stakeholders' risk aversion

The Alternative Pathways program represented a good opportunity to advance the field of rehabilitation and reintegration of extremist offenders using an inductive approach to elaborate evidence-based theories and hypotheses that could be translated into further programming. Plus, as a pilot initiative, it would have allowed for a significant reduction of uncertainty caused by reintegrating extremist offenders through the introduction of new solutions (the first program tailored specifically to this situation) and better risk estimation.

However, one of the main challenges encountered in implementing this program was correctional facilities being risk-averse and thus unwilling to implement untested initiatives. While this mindset is understandable, especially given the target population of this specific program, it is counterproductive when it came to advancing scientific discoveries and theories (what works, for whom, in what circumstances, how, and for how long when it comes to rehabilitating and reintegrating extremist offenders?) by introducing new evidence that broadens the current understanding of the field of rehabilitation and reintegration.

While risk aversion was undoubtedly not the only challenge that CEP encountered, the team believes that there are several critical points that would have helped improve program results:

- **Reducing the size of the target population.**
Originally, the program sought to deliver the in-person curriculum to at least four classes of at least 18 inmates (n = 72). Working with a smaller size target population might seem less precarious to the eyes of prison personnel. It would also be easier in terms of logistics, since smaller groups of inmates would require less personnel to be displaced across any correctional facility where the program would be implemented, a smaller classroom setting, and would be perceived as a lower risk.
- **Manage expectations.**
The terms "rehabilitation" and "reintegration" may be interpreted differently by individuals with different backgrounds. Seeing the risks associated with the reintegration of extremist offenders being unsuccessful, presenting this program to prison personnel as

a recidivism reduction initiative may have contributed to overall skepticism. Rather, the approach should have been to present the initiative as an exploratory study to better understand risk and protective factors associated with radicalization into violence.

- Increased capacity of correctional institutions to implement pilot programs.

While engaging with extremist offenders requires enhanced security measures, especially when it comes to monitoring conversations and activities of this particular prison population, increasing the capacity of correctional institutions to implement this kind of program would have surely increased the chances of Alternative Pathways being successful.

In the case of state institutions, an important challenge was insufficient funding and shortage of personnel. This is not to criticize decarceration policies or the closing of correctional facilities, but to adequately fund and staff institutions that are still functioning. Doing so would have allowed at least some of the staff to undergo the Alternative Pathways course using a train-the-trainer modality that would have capacitated them to transfer knowledge gained to their colleagues and co-workers.

Another possible solution would have been to work directly with the Bureau of Prisons (BOP), where most extremism-related offenders are currently housed. In this case, the challenge would have been establishing appropriate reporting mechanisms between BOP staff and the CEP team, but the bureaucracy of engaging with state institutions would have been overcome. For this to happen, however, implementing rehabilitation and reintegration programs for extremist offenders should be a priority for policymakers.

- Making the rehabilitation and reintegration of extremist offenders a priority for policymakers.

More than 25 percent of individuals convicted after the September 11, 2001, attacks will have been released by the end of 2023. Additionally, domestic terrorism prosecutions have increased by 431.4 percent since 2018, according to data from the U.S. Department of Justice.¹⁴ Despite the urgent need to address the rehabilitation and reintegration needs of convicted terrorists in the U.S., there is still not enough political support for in-community programs in the U.S. that meet the specific requirements of extremism-related convicts. Making rehabilitation and reintegration a political priority across the country would allow establishing the multisectoral communication amongst stakeholders and the implementation of a whole-of-society approach needed to address this issue, as it would improve buy-in from correctional institutions and legislators across the country.

¹⁴ “Terrorism-Domestic Prosecutions for August 2023,” TRAC Reports, October 6, 2023, <https://trac.syr.edu/tracreports/bulletins/domterror/monthlyaug23/fil/>

Rethinking the target population and program objectives

Given the general skepticism towards work conducted with extremism-related offenders, the CEP team did, at one point, consider modifying the target population for this initiative (see Objective 2 above). Indeed, while the Alternative Pathways team had initially intended to deliver in-person trainings to extremism-related convicts or individuals who would become at-risk for terrorism and targeted violence while in correctional facilities, circumstances forced the team to consider training the workforce in prisons.

In retrospect, however, designing the program to be delivered to staff at correctional institutions from the start might have helped the team overcome some of the difficulties in accessing these facilities. Still, the CEP team would have had to overcome the following challenges:

- **The appetite for rehabilitation and reintegration programs targeting extremist offenders.**
As mentioned, prison staff was skeptical about implementing rehabilitation and reintegration programs for extremism-related offenders given the risks associated with recidivism among this population (a product of increased stigma), the need to address more immediate needs in prisons (violence reduction and prevention), the perceived discrimination towards other inmates who would not be eligible for the program because of the nature of their offense (something other than extremism-related offenses) and the unwillingness to implement untested programs. While the CEP team indeed tailored the Alternative Pathways curriculum to fit the needs of violent offenders in general, the program might have been more successful if it had been presented as a violence reduction program aimed at building the capacity of prison staff to monitor violence-related behaviors, understanding the nature of these behaviors, and preventing similar incidents from occurring going forward, thus increasing overall safety in any correctional facility where the program was implemented.
- **Lack of resources in prisons.**
Even if the CEP team had managed to convince correctional institutions of the need to implement programs specifically for extremist offenders and/or of the benefits of prison personnel to undergo what could be described as a violence reduction initiative, the reality is that prisons across the U.S. are still understaffed. Thus, CEP would have still had to face the fact that correctional facilities would have been unable to designate part of their staff to undergo capacity building trainings. As stated above, properly staffing and funding functioning correctional institutions and making the rehabilitation and reintegration a political priority would facilitate the implementation of programs like Alternative Pathways, even when they were pilot initiatives.

Time management

Another of the big challenges associated with implementing Alternative Pathways was the constant pushback of the timeline, mainly due to delays in getting IRB approval and the delays associated with managing access to correctional institutions.

The CEP team did not receive IRB approval until 15 months into the implementation period. It is imperative to note that, given the target group for this project is a protected population, IRB processes are necessary to ensure that the “do no harm” imperative is upheld throughout the implementation period and when processing any of the information garnered through M&E processes. Additionally, it should be considered that the COVID-19 pandemic caused additional (and unforeseen) delays everywhere, and this also negatively impacted the IRB approval process. While it is not expected that another global pandemic would occur and negatively impact future projects requiring IRB review, any future initiatives that do require this IRB review would benefit from DHS explaining all details related to IRB processes before the grant period begins (maybe in the form of webinars) so that TVTP applicants could take this into consideration when drafting their program timelines.

Another element that future applicants should take into consideration when drafting program timelines, and to ensure that programs are impacted as little as possible, is the time that it takes to initiate and complete approval processes to operate within correctional facilities, especially when the target population are inmates themselves. While it is true that DHS now makes it a requirement for grant applicants to include a letter of commitment from any correctional institution they intend to work with when submitting the application, the Alternative Pathways project has made it evident that there are events on the ground (i.e., changes in prison policies, changes in prison management, etc.) that are beyond the control of the implementing team and that can cause delays in project implementation. To avoid problems derived from such situations, the CEP team would recommend future applicants secure the participation of at least two correctional institutions (preferably in different states), something which would also benefit M&E results by comparing different populations.

Flexibility and adaptation when implementing programs.

Another element that is compulsory when applying for any TVTP grant is the elaboration of a detailed contingency plan that outlines backup plans to be followed in case the implementing team runs into any difficulties or complications. However, as has been detailed throughout this report, there are unforeseen developments on the ground that may cause changes in implementation timelines. In these cases, it is crucial that teams attempting to work within the correctional system are open, flexible, and ready to quickly adapt to ever-evolving requirements, independent of whether they come from correctional institutions themselves or other external factors, such as the political climate or other events.

Had CEP known about the changes in California prison policies and the reluctance to implement rehabilitation and reintegration programs targeting extremist offenders, the team would have taken this into consideration in the original contingency plan. The original contingency plan only mentioned potential delays that would come about if RJDCF did not authorize the classes for instruction on time, or conditions at the jail (inmate lockdown) made it impossible to deliver classes to the target population during the grant period. Unaware of the skepticism revolving around implementing untested programs, particularly when they relate to extremism-related offenders, the CEP team was convinced that Choice Resources' connections across prisons in California would allow them to successfully complete the program. Unfortunately, and despite CEP's attempts to adapt to unforeseen realities, Objective 2 of the program was never implemented.

In this regard, the CEP team was always grateful for program managers at DHS's Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships (CP3), who were open to discussing program developments and willing to support any solutions that would enable implementation.

Communicating with the funder

Throughout the implementation period, the CEP was open and transparent regarding the limitations that were encountered and that were preventing the Alternative Pathways program from being implemented as initially intended, as well as with the devised solutions for each of the obstacles encountered. In response, the DHS-CP3 team was always supportive of the envisioned fixes and even facilitated communications between the CEP team and other DHS grantees who could facilitate access to correctional institutions across the U.S.

While these efforts were not fruitful, future grantees and implementing teams should not shy away from openly communicating with their program managers at DHS-CP3. From CEP's experience, fostering this communication will result in finding and promoting joint solutions, thus increasing chances of successful implementation.

Sustainability

Despite challenges encountered, there are reasons to believe that the outputs and impacts of this project will prove sustainable.

First, the CEP team has produced a series of deliverables, such as the theory of change and the Alternative Pathways workbook currently housed in the 4R Network website, that are now available to the public. Thanks to dissemination efforts conducted by CEP, the 4R Network currently has 107 members and about 50% of them are based outside the U.S., including Europe, Central and South Asia and Africa. This means that DHS-funded deliverables have the potential of making an impact beyond U.S. borders.

In this regard, the CEP team is particularly proud of how the Alternative Pathways workbook has been received in the Republic of Maldives (ROM). In August 2023, CEP was awarded a Department of State Counterterrorism Bureau (DHS-CT) grant to implement *Salaama: Supporting the Maldives National Reintegration Center (NRC) to provide safe and rehabilitative care of victims returning to the Maldives*, a project aiming to formulate a systems-based, whole-of-society approach that enhances the ability of the ROM’s NRC to successfully provide rehabilitative care to foreign fighters and family members returning to Maldives and other high-risk offenders, and to establish standard operating procedures (SOPs) and programs related to childcare, rehabilitation, and reintegration as well the provision of in-community care to reduce recidivism over the long term. “High-risk offenders” refers to individuals currently incarcerated in the country for extremism-related offenses.

Although **these efforts are strictly confidential**, as the Maldivian government has expressed their desire for activities conducted with individuals incarcerated for terrorism-related offenses to not be disseminated, project activities will include adapting the Alternative Pathways workbook to the Maldivian context and, once NRC staff are trained on how to deliver the curriculum, it will be administered to Maldivian high-risk offenders as well as adult victims at the NRC.¹⁵ Following the same procedures as the original Alternative Pathways program, the delivery of the *Salaama* workbook will serve a two-fold purpose. First, it will help design tailored intervention services for victims housed at the NRC and help connect them with specific service providers—whether it be mental health providers, social workers, or others—while in confinement at the NRC and/or as they move towards in-community release. Second, in cases in which the workbook is delivered to inmates who will then be transitioned into the NRC, the completion of the workbook will allow NRC staff to set-up tailored intervention plans that can best address their criminogenic needs even before they arrive at the NRC.

Upon completing the *Salaama* project, the CEP team will be able to disseminate results and compare them to those obtained in the U.S. This will be possible because the CEP team will continue to support extremist offenders who have engaged in the Alternative Pathways program as they continue to navigate the realities of post-release in the U.S. While continuing prison outreach will be complicated due to limited funding and time, CEP intends to continue to contact high-profile offenders who will be identified through the continued monitoring of the DOJ website. However, if these efforts are not fruitful one thing is certain: CEP will continue to maintain and advance relationships with law enforcement agencies across the country (including probation offices), some of which resulted from efforts related to setting up and hosting the Alternative Pathways conference.

¹⁵ In the Republic of Maldives, all individuals returning from ISIS-held territory who are not convicted and/or prosecuted are given victim treatment and directly housed at the NRC to undergo rehabilitation and reintegration programing before returning to the community.

Through these relationships, the CEP team hopes to continue to receive referrals from probation officers and secure the commitment of new parolees to complete the Alternative Pathways workbook as they receive support during their transition back into the community. Additionally, CEP will continue pursuing conversations with other correctional institutions in hopes that the Alternative Pathways program would be implemented on a larger scale than initially anticipated.

As these efforts develop, CEP will continue to conduct monitoring and evaluation activities that would allow for the drafting of comparative studies between different groups and target populations, the dissemination of results via different means (reports, academic papers, webinars, conferences, etc.) and the elucidation of promising practices in the field of rehabilitation and reintegration of extremist offenders, all in an effort to advance the field of targeted violence and terrorism prevention.