



Recidivism and Employment of Virginia Correctional Enterprises Participants: FY2020 State Responsible Releases

RESEARCH - EVALUATION UNIT

MAY 2025

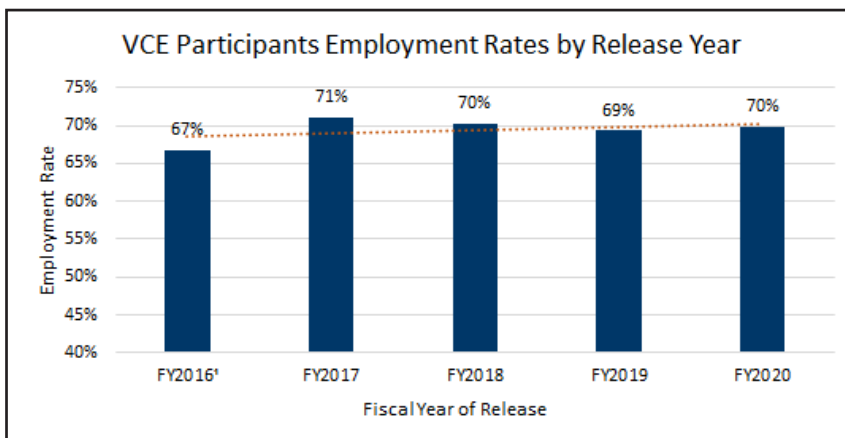
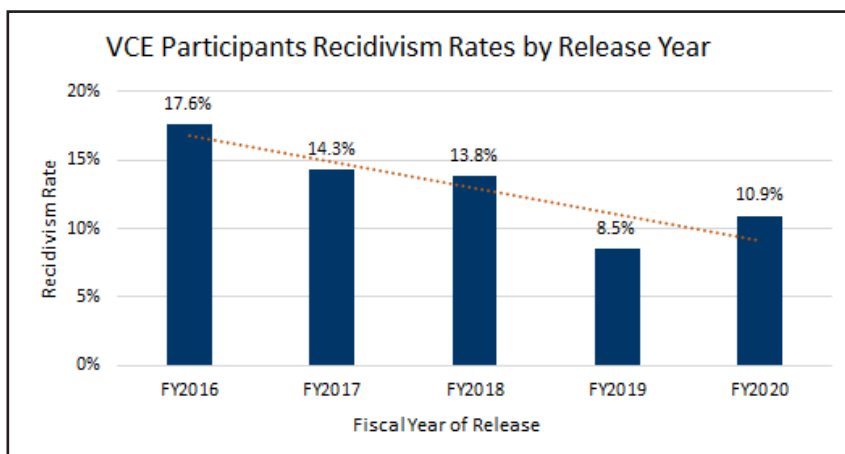
Introduction

Virginia Correctional Enterprises (VCE) provides inmates with workplace training, industry and vendor-specific certifications, and apprenticeships to support successful re-entry to the community. This report assesses the impact of VCE participation on job attainment and recidivism after release from state responsible (SR) incarceration. A total of 651 state responsible inmates who participated in Virginia Correctional Enterprises training were released in FY2020. Recidivism and employment trends from FY2016 to FY2020 releases were also assessed. A more in-depth analysis of the FY2020 cohort is provided since it is the most recent year for which a three-year follow-up is available with mature data.

Employment and Recidivism Trends: FY2016-FY2020

Of the five-year comparison, VCE participants released in FY2016 had the highest recidivism rate at 17.6%. FY2019 participants had the lowest recidivism rate of the five years examined (8.5%). Although there was a slight increase in recidivism rates between the FY2019 and FY2020 cohorts, recidivism rates have been trending down since FY2016, which mirrors the overall SR release cohort trend during the same timeframe.¹ This may be partially explained by the COVID-19 pandemic limiting court activity during the FY2017-FY2020 three-year follow-up periods.

Across FY2016-FY2020 releases that participated in VCE, FY2017 participants had the highest employment rate at 71%. FY2016² VCE participants had the lowest employment rate after release at 67%. The employment rate has remained fairly consistent since FY2017, with a one percentage point increase between FY2019 and FY2020.³



¹ VADOC Research-Evaluation Unit (2024): FY2020 State Responsible Releases.

² At the time of report development for the FY2016 cohort, employment data from quarters one and two of FY2016 were not included in data provided by the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC).

³ The COVID-19 pandemic may have impacted employment rates during the FY2017-FY2020 follow-up periods due to shut-downs and restrictions.

FY2020 VCE Participant Characteristics

Among the 651 VCE participants released in FY2020, 68% were male and 32% were female. The racial composition of the participants was 54% White, 45% Black, 1% Asian or Pacific Islander, and less than 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native. The average age at release was 43.4 years old (median = 42 years old). There were equal percentages of participants between the ages of 30-39 and 40-49 at release (30%).

Demographic factors such as gender and age are known predictors of recidivism.⁴ VCE participants who were female were

less likely to recidivate than VCE participants who were male (10.5% and 11.1%, respectively). Participants who were White had higher recidivism rates than those who were Black (14.1% and 7.2%, respectively). Participants between the age of 30-39 at release had the highest recidivism rate of any age group (14.3%). VCE participants had a lower recidivism rate (10.9%) compared to all FY2020 SR releases (17.6%). VADOC facility releases that participated in VCE were significantly less likely to recidivate than those who did not participate (10.9% and 15.4%, respectively).⁵ Additionally, regression analysis showed that, when all other factors are kept constant, VCE participation was not a statistically significant predictor of recidivism.⁶

Employment and Recidivism

For this study, participants were counted as employed only if their wages were reportable to the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC). Those with unreported wages could have been employed in another state or with an employer not subject to the unemployment compensation laws.⁷ According to VEC data, 70% of VCE participants released in FY2020 were employed at some point during the three-year follow-up period,⁸ which is nine percentage points higher than the proportion of overall FY2020 SR releases who found employment post-release (61%). VCE participants who found employment after release had a lower recidivism rate than participants who were unable to find employment (10.5% and 11.7%, respectively). The difference among VCE participants who did find employment and those who did not find employment was not statistically significant.

VCE participants who were female were able to find employment at a slightly higher rate than VCE participants who were male (72% and 69%, respectively). A higher percentage of VCE participants who were Black were able to find employment than participants who were White (75%, and 66%, respectively). VCE participants under the

FY2020 VCE Participants Demographic Characteristics, Recidivism Rates, and Employment						
	VCE Participants*		Recidivists**		Employed After Release**	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
Overall	651	100%	71	10.9%	455	70%
Gender						
Male	441	68%	49	11.1%	303	69%
Female	210	32%	22	10.5%	152	72%
Race						
White	355	54%	50	14.1%	234	66%
Black	292	45%	21	7.2%	220	75%
Asian or Pacific Islander	3	1%	0	0.0%	1	33%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1	<1%	0	0.0%	0	0%
Age at Release						
Under 30	64	10%	9	14.1%	55	86%
30-39	196	30%	28	14.3%	153	78%
40-49	198	30%	18	9.1%	130	66%
50-59	133	21%	14	10.5%	88	66%
60+	60	9%	2	3.3%	29	48%
Age at Release (Mean)	43.4					
Age at Release (Median)	42.0					
*Percentages in the VCE Participants column will total 100% as they are calculated out of the total number of VCE participants.						
**Percentages in the Recidivists and Employed After Release columns were calculated out of the total number within each specific category.						

4 VADOC Research-Evaluation Unit (2024): FY2020 State Responsible Releases.

5 Chi square(χ^2) <.005.

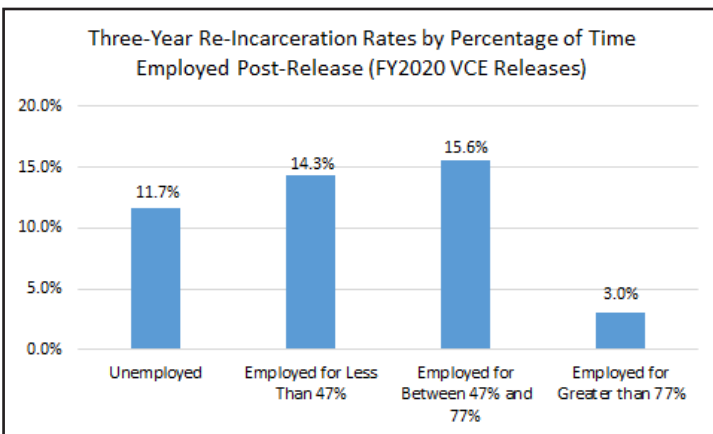
6 Determined using a logistic regression model controlling for gender, mental impairment, age at release, number of previous SR incarcerations, crime type of MSO, testing positive for opioids and/or cocaine, percentage of time employed post-release, and VCE participation. Even with all additional factors, VCE participation was not a significant predictor of recidivism.

7 Only Virginia employers who are subject to tax provisions of the unemployment compensation laws are included in the data; freelance/under the table employment and employment records from outside of Virginia are not included; <https://www.vec.virginia.gov/employers/>.

8 The follow-up period was from the quarter/year the inmate was released through 12 additional quarters or through the quarter/year the inmate recidivated.

age of 30 at release had the highest employment rate of any age group (86%). Participants 60 years and older at release had the lowest employment rate after release (48%). As age increased, the employment rate decreased.

Inmates who found employment and were employed between 47% to 77% of the time they were at liberty during the follow-up period had the highest recidivism rate (15.6%). Those who were employed for greater than 77% of the time they were at liberty during the follow-up period had the lowest recidivism rate (3.0%), which is just over one percentage point lower than the same population in the overall FY2020 cohort (4.1%). VCE participants had lower recidivism rates than the overall FY2020 cohort in all categories of employment except those employed for between 47-77% of the time they were at liberty.



Employment and Earnings

Of the 455 employed VCE participants, it took almost one and one-half quarters (1.4), on average, to find employment after release. Employed participants made, on average, \$6,099.41 quarterly (median of \$5,483.33). These participants sustained employment, on average, 58% of the time (median of 62%) they were at liberty and averaged three different employers during the follow-up period.

FY2020 VCE Participants Employment Statistics		
	Mean	Median
Quarterly Wages	\$6,099.41	\$5,483.33
Time to Employment*	1.4 Quarters	1 Quarter
Percent Employed**	58%	62%
Number of Employers	3	3

*Time to employment was calculated as the difference between employment quarter/year and release quarter/year.

**Percent of eligible quarters an individual was employed while at liberty.

The majority of VCE participants who were employed post-release found employment in the Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services industry (29%), Accommodation and Food Services industry (23%), Retail Trade industry (12%), Manufacturing industry (11%), or in the Construction industry (10%).

FY2020 VCE Participants who Obtained Employment after Release by Industry Type		
	Total	Percent
Employment Rate	455	70%
Industry Type*		
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	1	<1%
Construction	45	10%
Manufacturing	50	11%
Wholesale Trade	15	3%
Retail Trade	54	12%
Transportation and Warehousing	12	3%
Finance and Insurance	1	<1%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	2	<1%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	6	1%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	134	29%
Health Care and Social Assistance	12	3%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	2	<1%
Accommodation and Food Services	105	23%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	9	2%
Public Administration	4	1%
No Industry Code	3	1%

*Virginia Employment Commission records of the first job the VCE Participant earned wages from upon release from SR incarceration were used to classify industry type. Industry types were created based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).

Crime Type

Crime type represents the most serious offense from the FY2020 release term of incarceration. The largest percentage of VCE participants released in FY2020 had a violent crime type (47%). Participants with a crime type of property/public order had a higher recidivism rate (15.2%) than participants with drug-related (7.9%) or violent (9.1%) crime types. FY2020 VCE participants had lower recidivism rates in all three crime type categories than all FY2020 SR releases. Participants with a most serious offense that was property/public order had a slightly higher employment rate (75%) than those with drug-related (72%) and violent (65%) crime types.

FY2020 VCE Participants Recidivism Rates and Employment by Crime Type and Previous SR Incarcerations						
	VCE Participants*		Recidivists**		Employed After Release**	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
Overall	651	100%	71	10.9%	455	70%
Crime Type						
Violent	308	47%	28	9.1%	201	65%
Property/Public Order	217	33%	33	15.2%	163	75%
Drug	126	20%	10	7.9%	91	72%
Previous SR Incarcerations						
No previous SR terms	365	56%	26	7.1%	247	68%
1 previous SR term	136	21%	16	11.8%	106	78%
2 previous SR terms	79	12%	11	13.9%	58	73%
3 or more previous SR terms	71	11%	18	25.4%	44	62%

*Percentages in the VCE Participants column will total 100% as they are calculated out of the total number of VCE participants.

**Percentages in the Recidivists and Employed After Release columns were calculated out of the total number within each specific category.

SR Incarceration History

The majority of the VCE participants released in FY2020 had no previous SR terms of incarceration (56%). Inmates with one previous term of SR incarceration (21%) outnumbered those with two previous SR terms (12%) and those with three or more previous SR terms (11%). As the number of previous SR incarcerations increased, recidivism rates increased. FY2020 VCE participants had lower recidivism rates than all FY2020 SR releases in all previous SR term categories except those with three or more previous SR terms. Participants with one previous SR term had the highest employment rate (78%), while those with three or more previous SR terms had the lowest employment rate (62%).

COMPAS Risk and Needs Assessment

The COMPAS Risk and Needs Assessment tool is used by the VADOC to determine the risks of general and violent recidivism as well as criminogenic needs. There were more VCE participants who scored 'Low' (42%) than those who scored 'Medium' or 'High' on the COMPAS risk of general recidivism scale (34% and 24%, respectively).⁹ Those who scored 'Medium' on the COMPAS Risk of General Recidivism scale had the highest recidivism rates (16.4%). Those who scored 'High' on the COMPAS Risk of General Recidivism scale had the highest employment rates (76%). Participants who scored 'Low' on the Risk of General Recidivism scale had the lowest recidivism rates (4.8%) and the lowest employment rates (65%).

FY2020 VCE Participants Recidivism Rates and Employment by COMPAS* Scores						
	VCE Participants**		Recidivists***		Employed After Release***	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
Overall	651	100%	71	10.9%	455	70%
COMPAS Risk of General Recidivism*						
Low	272	42%	13	4.8%	176	65%
Medium	219	34%	36	16.4%	157	72%
High	159	24%	22	13.8%	121	76%
COMPAS Risk of Violent Recidivism*						
Low	356	55%	26	7.3%	232	65%
Medium	198	30%	31	15.7%	153	77%
High	96	15%	14	14.6%	69	72%
COMPAS Substance Abuse Needs*						
Unlikely	150	23%	6	4.0%	97	65%
Probable	166	26%	19	11.4%	117	70%
Highly Probable	334	51%	46	13.8%	240	72%

*The last COMPAS assessment during the release term of incarceration was used. There was one FY2020 VCE participant who did not receive a COMPAS assessment.

**Percentages in the VCE Participants column will total 100% as they are calculated out of the total number of VCE participants.

***Percentages in the Recidivists and Employed After Release columns were calculated out of the total number within each specific category.

⁹ There was one FY2020 VCE participant who did not receive a COMPAS assessment.

For the COMPAS Risk of Violent Recidivism scale, those who scored 'Low' comprised the majority of the cohort (55%), while those who scored 'Medium' or 'High' made up 30% and 15% of the cohort, respectively. Those who scored 'Medium' had the highest recidivism rate (15.7%) and the highest employment rate (77%). Those who scored 'Low' had the lowest recidivism rate (7.3%) and the lowest employment rate (65%).

Over one-half of participants scored 'Highly Probable' (51%) on the COMPAS Substance Abuse needs scale. Those who scored 'Unlikely' had a lower recidivism rate (4.0%) than those who scored 'Probable' or 'Highly Probable' (11.4% and 13.8%, respectively). Participants who scored 'Highly Probable' had the highest employment rate (72%), while those who scored 'Unlikely' had the lowest employment rate (65%).

Conclusions

This report examined the recidivism and job attainment rates of VCE participants who were released from SR incarceration in FY2020. VCE participants achieved a lower recidivism rate than Virginia's overall recidivism rate and a higher employment rate than Virginia's overall release cohort employment rate. Additionally, employment rates of VCE participants have stayed fairly consistent while recidivism rates continue to have a notable downward trend. These preliminary findings offer additional evidence that VCE participation may support successful re-entry by promoting job attainment, employment stability, and reducing the risk of recidivism.

Virginia Department of Corrections
6900 Atmore Drive
P.O. Box 26963

RESEARCH - EVALUATION UNIT

Tama S. Celi, Ph.D.
Brittney Via, M.A.
Megan Skolnick, M.A.

research@vadoc.virginia.gov