

PROGRAM BRIEF

PRISON INDUSTRY ENHANCEMENT CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

The Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Program (PIECP) is an effective inmate employment program that enables prisoners to repay their debt to society, reduce incarceration costs, and prepare for release with improved work prospects. In the process, PIECP supports victims' families, decreases recidivism, generates products and tax income for local economies, and uses free-market principles and private-sector participation to improve efficiency in the corrections industry.

How PIECP Works

PIECP enables private industry to establish joint ventures with federal, state, local, and tribal corrections agencies to produce goods using prison labor. Inmates are placed in realistic work environments that approximate private-sector jobs and are paid a prevailing local wage. In doing so, they acquire marketable skills that improve their chances for successful rehabilitation and meaningful employment upon reentry.

At the same time, the goods they produce help to offset the cost of their incarceration, compensate crime victims, and support inmates' families. Research shows that parties other than the inmates themselves are the first beneficiaries of PIECP inmate incomes: 30 percent is returned in the form of taxpayer savings (through room and board deductions); 11 percent to Social Security and Medicare, and 8 percent to victims of crime (Petersik, T., T. Nayak, and M.K. Foreman, *Identifying Beneficiaries of PIE Inmate Incomes*, The National Correctional Industries Association, July 31, 2003. Available at www.nationalcia.org/wp-content/uploads//researchfullrpt1.pdf).

Up to 50 jurisdictions around the country may be certified under PIECP. Certification in the program exempts the corrections agency from normal restrictions on the sale of inmate-made goods in interstate commerce, which is prohibited by 18 U.S.C. 1761(a). As of July 2018,

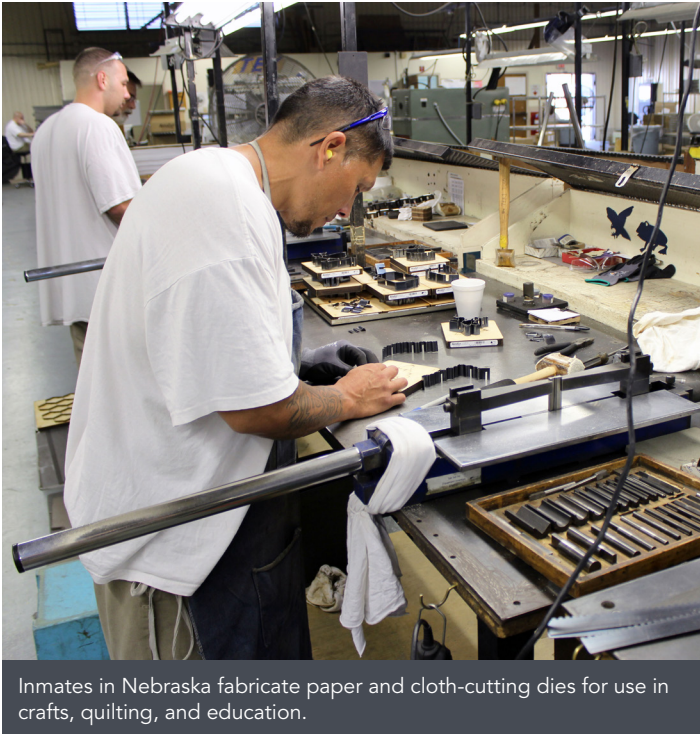


An inmate solders a circuit board in California.

44 jurisdictions are participating in the program. To become certified, a program must demonstrate to the Bureau of Justice Assistance that it meets statutory and guideline requirements outlined in the Criteria for Program Participation (see page 3).

A Record of Success

A major 2006 study found that inmates who worked in PIECP jobs were significantly more successful in post-release employment: they became tax-paying citizens more quickly and remained so longer than workers in traditional industries. PIECP participants also had



Inmates in Nebraska fabricate paper and cloth-cutting dies for use in crafts, quilting, and education.

less recidivism, as measured by arrest, conviction, and incarceration (Smith, C.J., J. Bechtel, A. Patrick, R.R. Smith, and L. Wilson-Gentry, *Correctional Industries Preparing Inmates for Re-entry: Recidivism and Post-release Employment*, final report submitted to the National Institute of Justice, Washington, DC: June 2006 (NCJ 214608). Available at www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/214608.pdf.

PIECP has proven to be a positive experience for prison administrators, who recognize its value in covering some of the costs of corrections, lending inmates a sense of normalcy that comes from introducing private-sector activity to prison, and increasing positive behavior among inmates.

From the program's inception in 1979, PIECP workers have contributed approximately \$85 million to victims' compensation funds, \$272 million to cover costs of incarceration, \$48 million in family support, and \$103 million in taxes (PIECP Quarterly Statistical Report - Cumulative Data, 1st Quarter 2018).

Background

PIECP was created by Congress in 1979 to encourage state and local governments to establish employment opportunities for prisoners that approximate private-sector work opportunities. It was initially authorized under the Justice System Improvement Act of 1979 and later expanded under the Justice Assistance Act of 1984. The Crime Control Act of 1990 authorizes continuation of the program indefinitely, and in 2012 Congress expanded PIECP to allow federal agency participation.

Primary Objectives of PIECP

- Provide inmates with marketable job skills, reduce prison idleness, and improve the prospects for post-release employment and ultimately successful inmate reentry.
- Generate products that enable inmates to make a contribution to society, help offset the cost of their incarceration, compensate crime victims, and support their own families.

Program Benefits

PIECP enables private industry to establish joint ventures with federal, state, local, and tribal correctional agencies to produce goods using prison labor. The program benefits:

- **Corrections Administrators** – PIECP is not only a cost-effective way to offer job skills training to a portion of the inmate population; it also enhances institutional safety by improving inmate behavior during incarceration.
- **Crime Victims** – PIECP provides a means of partial repayment to crime victims.
- **Families** – PIECP allows deductions from inmate wages for family support.
- **Inmates** – Through voluntary participation in the program, inmates are offered the opportunity to work, meet financial obligations, increase job skills, and

increase the likelihood of meaningful employment upon release from incarceration.

- **Private-Sector Companies** – PIECP provides a stable and readily available workforce that does not displace employed workers in the community. In addition, many correctional agencies provide manufacturing space to private-sector companies involved in the program.
- **The Public** – Through inmate contributions to room and board, family support, victim compensation, and taxes, the program provides a way to offset the cost of incarceration.

Criteria for Program Participation

Corrections departments that apply to participate in PIECP must meet all of the following criteria:

1. Legislative authority to pay wages at a rate not less than that paid for similar work in the same locality's private sector.
2. Written assurances that the program will not result in the displacement of workers employed in the community before program implementation.
3. Authority to provide worker benefits, including workers' compensation or its equivalent.
4. Authority to involve the private sector in the production and sale of prisoner-made goods.
5. Written assurances that inmate participation is voluntary.
6. Legislative or administrative authority to collect and provide financial contributions of not less than 5 percent and not more than 20 percent of gross wages to crime victim compensation/assistance programs.
7. Written proof of consultation with organized labor and local private industry before program startup.
8. Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and related federal environmental review requirements.

PIECP at Work

California launched a cost accounting center (CAC) where inmates learn HTML coding, a very marketable job skill. The CAC's private partner either hires or helps place released inmates in a job with another technology company. Released inmates are hired as web developers and software engineers.

Kansas has two CACs (wire harness assembly and transportation seating) where both private partners hire inmates after release to work in a variety of production jobs.

Iowa operates a CAC that has hired inmates after release, with some of these former inmates working their way up to positions such as plant manager and supervisor.



Top: An inmate team performing website accessibility analysis in Oregon. Bottom: An inmate in Utah works a router in a furniture shop.



An inmate fabricates paper and cloth-cutting dies in Nebraska for use in crafts, quilting, and education.

Allowable Wage Deductions

Corrections departments may take a series of deductions from wages earned by inmates. Permissible deductions are limited to room and board, taxes (such as federal, state, and FICA), family support, and crime victim compensation/assistance. Deductions must not total more than 80 percent of gross wages.

Program Certification Process

Interested corrections departments may request a PIECP Certification Application from BJA or the National Correctional Industries Association. Applicants must provide written proof that they meet all mandatory program criteria (including copies of legislation and/or administrative rulings, as appropriate). After reviewing an application, BJA will formally notify the jurisdiction that it has been certified to participate in the program. Certified jurisdictions must agree to enforce program requirements. Certification may be terminated if a jurisdiction is found to be out of compliance with any of the mandatory program criteria or if the certification is unused for 6 months or longer.

ABOUT BJA

BJA helps to make American communities safer by strengthening the nation's criminal justice system: Its grants, training and technical assistance, and policy development services provide state, local, and tribal governments with the cutting edge tools and best practices they need to reduce violent and drug-related crime, support law enforcement, and combat victimization. To learn more about BJA, visit www.bja.gov, or follow us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/DOJBJA) and Twitter (@DOJBJA). BJA is part of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs.

For Further Information

For inquiries from governmental agencies, media, and the general public:

Bureau of Justice Assistance
(202) 616-6500
AskBJA@usdoj.gov
www.bja.gov

For program assistance requests from current and prospective program participants:

National Correctional Industries Association
PIECP Training and Technical Assistance
(410) 230-3972
www.nationalcia.org

The National Correctional Industries Association (NCIA), the association for correctional industries professionals, provides training and technical assistance to current and prospective program participants. Under a cooperative agreement from BJA, NCIA coordinates annual PIECP assessments to ensure program participants meet the requirements for program compliance.

Eligibility

All departments of corrections and juvenile justice agencies authorized by law to administer correctional industry programs are eligible to apply for PIECP certification.