



Center for
Employment
Opportunities

2021 End of Year Impact Report

Your generous support of the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) helped us to accomplish so much in 2021. Returning citizens faced many challenges throughout the year; they navigated delicate homecomings, new technologies, engagement with probation or parole, and the anxieties of finding a job. CEO provided the support our job seekers needed to find employment as they returned home in the midst of the COVID pandemic.



4,035 Individuals on our Crews

Our transitional crews provide hands-on, paid work experience to all participants within days of enrollment.



\$13,349,242 Paid in Wages

CEO provides daily pay to all participants so they can better support themselves and their families.



2,203 People Placed in Jobs

Our staff provides individual support to place participants in unsubsidized full time roles with employer partners.



806 Certifications Achieved

CEO offers free vocational certification opportunities for our participants.



Program Overview

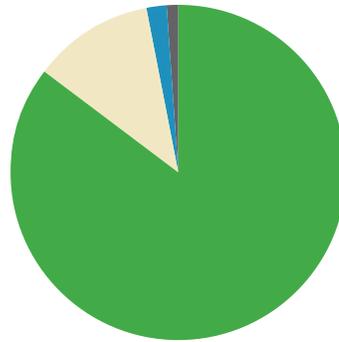
At CEO, we work to provide job seekers coming home from incarceration the support they need to achieve social and economic mobility. Although this past year has placed numerous strains on providers like CEO, we have continued to provide high quality employment services in accordance with strict COVID safety protocols thanks to our committed staff, employer partners, and supporters like you.

Internally, we have advanced our diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts with a focus on elevating the voices of our colleagues and program participants with lived experience. These efforts strengthened our community and affirmed our recently refreshed [CEO Core Values](#).

Despite the ever-changing world around us, in 2021, CEO was able to launch exciting new programs and initiatives to further support individuals coming home to achieve social and economic mobility. What follows are a few highlights of our recent efforts.

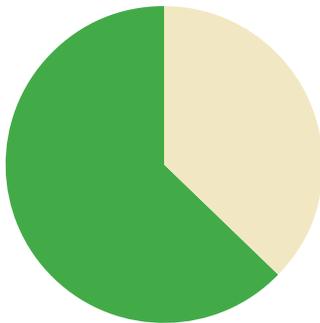
CEO PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed a great number of foundational failings, most troubling of which is the disproportionate effects of the disease on communities of color. This reality falls against a backdrop of preexisting, persistent racial disparities in the criminal legal system. At CEO, over 84% of program participants are people of color.



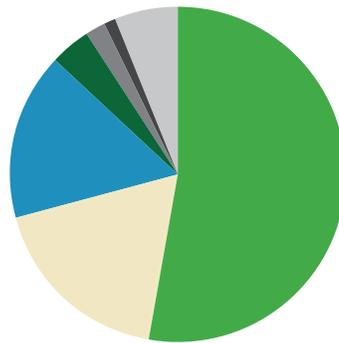
Participant Gender

- 88% Men
- 11% Women
- .9% Unreported
- .1% Transgender or Gender Nonconforming



Participant Age

- 2,963 Adults (Ages 31+)
- 1,772 Young Adults (Ages 18-30)



Participant Race/Ethnicity

- 53% Black
- 18% Hispanic/Latinx
- 16% White
- 4% Mixed Race
- 2% Native American
- 1% Asian
- 6% Other

Policy & Advocacy: Participant Advisory Council

CEO is dedicated to ensuring that those with lived experience are at the forefront of our policy and advocacy work. To this end, we launched our Participant Advocate Council (PAC) – a group of program alumni and current participants who convene to discuss their experiences, build community and solidarity, and identify systemic barriers and policy solutions to improve outcomes for people returning home from incarceration. Currently, CEO has PACs in California, New York, Michigan, and Colorado, each playing a crucial role in helping to shape our policy priorities, educating decision-makers, and organizing peers around key issues that affect justice-impacted individuals. In 2021, nearly two dozen CEO PAC members took part in the Less is More coalition in New York State, securing a major legislative victory for parole reform.

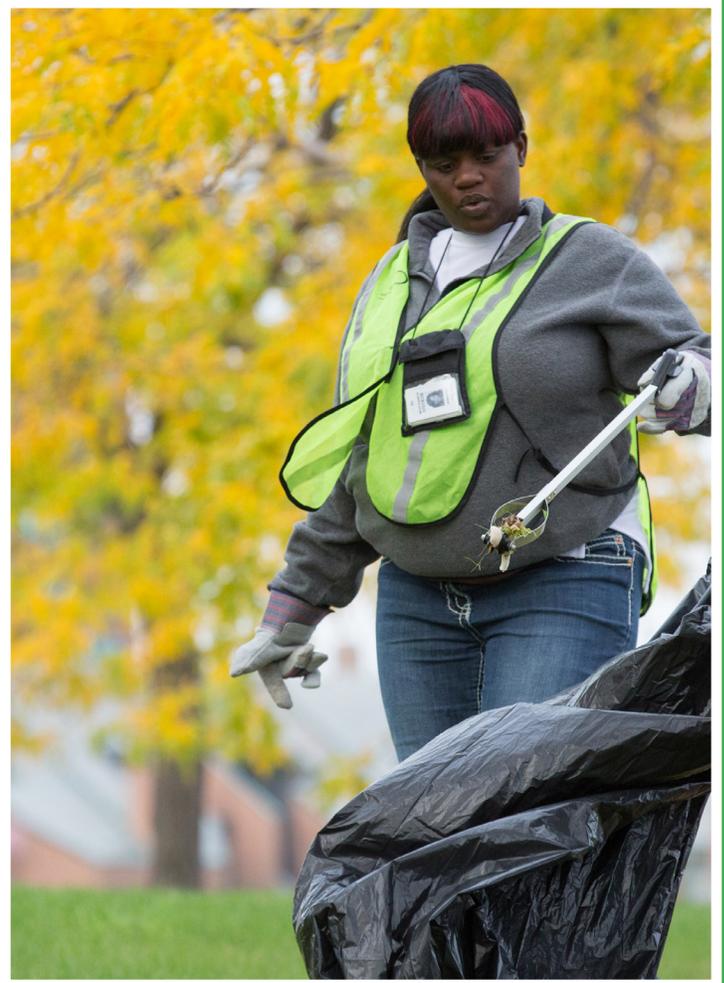
Emerging Leaders Program (ELP)

To elevate the impact of participant leadership and advocacy work, CEO established a more in-depth leadership development initiative, the Emerging Leaders Program (ELP) Fellowships. Within the ELP program, participants can engage in apprenticeship-style work that prepares them to become full-time CEO staff or to seek similar work with other employers.

For example, PAC alumni can elect to join the Policy Fellows track within ELP, attending the program's overall professional development sessions while embedding themselves with CEO's policy team. Recently, one of our ELP Fellows just accepted an offer of full-time employment at CEO NYC as an Outreach Specialist. These fellowship opportunities are an essential component of preparing returning citizens for lifelong careers and enables those who have experienced our program to define our future.

Paving the Way Home: An Evaluation of the Returning Citizen Stimulus Program

With over \$24 million distributed to more than 10,000 people, the [Returning Citizen Stimulus \(RCS\) Program](#) is the largest ever cash transfer to formerly incarcerated individuals. In October, research firm MDRC released a study on RCS which found that the program was successful in helping individuals achieve a sense of financial stability as they transitioned back into their communities in the midst of the economic downturn fueled by the pandemic. The study also found that the majority of RCS recipients used the cash payments to cover essential expenses such as rent, groceries, and clothing; to reconnect with family members; and on personal care. These are all areas that are essential to prepare for finding and obtaining full time employment. CEO is working closely with MDRC to continue studying the program in order to better understand the long-term benefits of cash assistance. Read the [full report](#) and [executive summary](#) for more about the impact of RCS.



Inclusive Hiring: Increasing Career Opportunities for Persons with Past Convictions

After decades of providing employment support and resources to formerly incarcerated jobseekers, CEO recognized that it is not enough for us to just focus on the supply side of the labor market; in order to advance social and economic mobility for returning citizens, we also need to build the demand side of the market and create a viable pathway for returning citizens to access quality jobs. In 2021, we built a dedicated team to work with large and mid-sized employers to create hiring policies that reduce barriers for jobseekers with a conviction history. In partnership with the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), CEO has developed and disseminated tools and resources to activate business leaders and open up upwardly mobile career pathways for justice-involved individuals.

Training Opportunities (NEST)

Adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic required identifying novel ways to engage our job seekers and provide credentialed training opportunities. We launched our Network for Employment Services and Training (NEST) online platform as a way to continue providing uninterrupted educational services to participants virtually or telephonically. NEST offers a variety of virtual credentialed skills training courses through partner organizations and additional relevant training led by CEO staff. Participants can access regular OSHA construction training courses as well as personal finance and wellness modules. The NEST platform has helped CEO to scale trainings nationally to help our job seekers achieve higher starting wages. Additionally, we are currently piloting an in-depth digital skills curriculum at four offices and are planning to add basic digital literacy training to our programming across all 31 CEO sites this year.

PARTICIPANT STORY

“I come from a gang background,” Aaron says. “I’ve always had a street mentality, that was just my life.” Growing up surrounded by street gangs in Northern California’s East Bay, Aaron says that he always expected to end up in prison one day, and unfortunately, his fears eventually became a reality. However, after his incarceration, Aaron says that his mindset about life had changed.

“When I got out, I knew that I wanted to do something better. I didn’t want to waste my life in prison. I wanted to do right for my family. I didn’t want my kids to grow up influenced by the street mentality like I was.”

Because of his criminal record, Aaron found it hard to reintegrate into society after incarceration. He says that even his tattoos caused some employers to deny him employment. Soon, he found himself homeless and living on the streets with his girlfriend and their newborn twins. Eventually, they were able to gain access to a small car. Most nights Aaron would sleep outside on a bench, while his girlfriend stayed inside the vehicle with their infants since there wasn’t enough room for all of them in the car.

“We were doing bad,” Aaron says. “I was really down and depressed. It was tough living on the streets with newborns and trying to provide food for them. I wanted something better for them and myself.”

Then Aaron heard that the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) was offering jobs on transitional work crews and he immediately signed up. Through this opportunity, he also found out about CEO’s Returning Citizen Stimulus (RCS) program, which offered cash assistance to formerly incarcerated individuals in need.

“I really needed help and CEO made sure that I got it,” Aaron says. “It allowed me to get my life back together. I just wanted to house my family and have money to eat. Because of the RCS program, I was able to feed my babies and myself. Without it, I don’t know what I would’ve done.”

Through RCS assistance, Aaron was able to secure housing for himself and his family. After that, he says that everything in his life started to fall into place, and this newfound stability allowed him to secure full-time employment. Today, Aaron is a CCTV inspector, which involves using remote-controlled cameras to capture video of internal pipe conditions to assess for damage and ensure proper drainage.

Because of his full-time employment, Aaron was able to save up money and start his own business, a party rental service called Los Gemelos Party Rentals, meaning “the twins”. Starting with only business cards and an inflatable children’s bounce house, little by little he added more equipment and accommodations, to the point where he is now able to serve multiple parties.

“Things are going much better now for me because of the RCS program,” Aaron says. “I’m not on the streets anymore, and I’m still living in the same house that CEO helped me get. We don’t have much, but what I do have is my freedom, and my children have a home. I don’t ever want to live like that again.”





Job Placements by Industry

CEO develops partnerships with local employers to provide career pathways for our participants within industries that align with their interests and goals. After securing placement, CEO provides one year of retention services to ensure that our participants are given the support they need to succeed and achieve long term socio-economic success.

- **19.91%** Manufacturing
- **13.51%** Construction
- **10.21%** Business Support Services
- **9.06%** Staffing Agencies
- **7.37%** Other Services
- **7.07%** Food Services
- **5.76%** Retail
- **5.42%** Social Assistance
- **3.77%** Warehousing
- **17.92%** Other

Shifting Policies to Remove Barriers

We believe that in order to begin to undo the harm of mass incarceration, we must invest resources back into the communities that have been most affected by incarceration through our policy and advocacy work. CEO is working to shift those policies to remove barriers that individuals coming from incarceration face. We believe that our policy work is most effective when we listen to the stories and lean on the leadership of justice-impacted persons and communities.

As our nation works to recover from the pandemic, there is an immense opportunity to create a more equitable economy that supports marginalized workers and promotes skill development and career advancement. Economic equity and justice issues remain at the core of CEO's long-term mission to improve the lives of those returning home from incarceration.



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For a location near you, please visit:

ceoworks.org