



Recidivism and Employment of Virginia Correctional Enterprises Participants: FY21 State Responsible Releases

RESEARCH - EVALUATION UNIT

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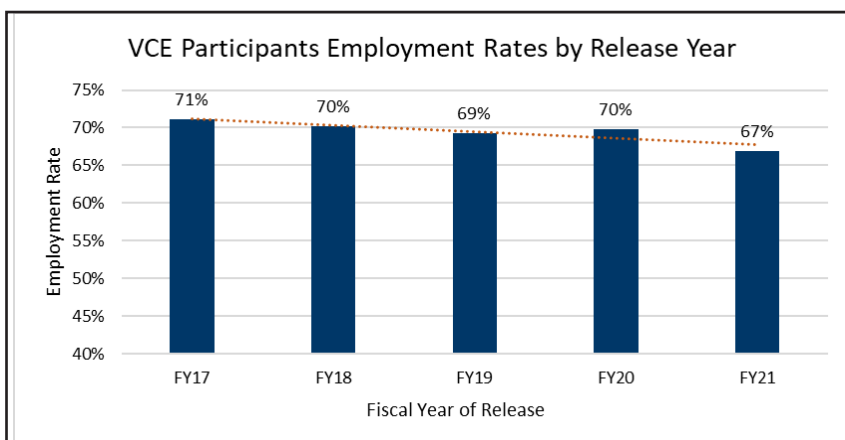
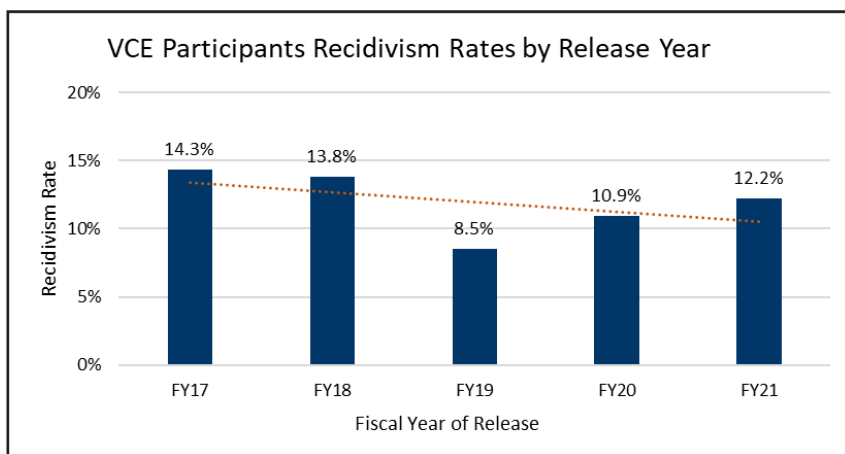
Introduction

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 474 state responsible inmates who participated in Virginia Correctional Enterprises training were released in FY21. Recidivism and employment trends from FY17 to FY21 releases were also assessed. A more in-depth analysis of the FY21 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: FY17-FY21

Of the five-year comparison, VCE participants released in FY17 had the highest recidivism rate at 14.3%. FY19 participants had the lowest recidivism rate of the five years examined (8.5%). Recidivism rates have been slowly increasing since FY19. This may be due to court activity returning to pre-pandemic levels. However, recidivism rates for VCE participants are still lower than the overall release cohorts.¹

Across FY17-FY21 releases that participated in VCE, FY17 participants had the highest employment rate at 71%. FY21 VCE participants had the lowest employment rate after release at 67%. Between FY17-FY20, the employment rate has remained fairly consistent, with a one percentage point increase between FY19 and FY20.² From FY20 to FY21, the employment rate decreased by three percentage points.



¹ VADOC Research-Evaluation Unit (2026): FY2021 State Responsible Releases.

² The COVID-19 pandemic may have impacted employment rates during the FY17-FY20 follow-up periods due to shut-downs and restrictions.

FY21 VCE Participant Characteristics

Among the 474 VCE participants released in FY21, 78% were male and 22% were female. The racial composition of the participants was 50% White, 50% Black, and less than 1% Asian or Pacific Islander. The average age at release was 43.9 years old (median 43 years old). The largest percentage of participants were between the ages of 40-49 at release (32%). There were equal percentages of participants under 30 and over 60 at release (10%).

Demographic factors such as gender and age are known predictors of recidivism.³

VCE participants who were female were less likely to recidivate than VCE participants who were male (8.7% and 13.2%, respectively). Participants who were White had higher recidivism rates than those who were Black (14.4% and 9.7%, respectively). Participants under the age of 30 at release had the highest recidivism rate of any age group (18.4%). VCE participants had a lower recidivism rate (12.2%) compared to all FY21 SR releases (18.8%). Regression analysis showed that, when all other factors are kept constant, VCE participation was not a statistically significant predictor of recidivism.⁴

	VCE Participants*		Recidivists**		Employed After Release**	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
Overall	474	100%	58	12.2%	317	67%
Gender						
Male	370	78%	49	13.2%	253	68%
Female	104	22%	9	8.7%	64	62%
Race						
White	236	50%	34	14.4%	145	61%
Black	236	50%	23	9.7%	170	72%
Asian or Pacific Islander	2	<1%	1	50.0%	2	100%
Age at Release						
Under 30	49	10%	9	18.4%	41	84%
30-39	125	26%	17	13.6%	88	70%
40-49	153	32%	15	9.8%	102	67%
50-59	101	21%	11	10.9%	65	64%
60+	46	10%	6	13.0%	21	46%
Age at Release (Mean)	43.9					
Age at Release (Median)	43.0					
*Percentages in the VCE Participants column are calculated out of the total number of VCE participants. Due to rounding, percentages may total between 99 and 101.						
**Percentages in the Recidivists and Employed After Release columns were calculated out of the total number within each specific category.						

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.⁵ According to VEC data, 67% of VCE participants released in FY21 were employed at some point during the three-year follow-up period,⁶ which is eight percentage points higher than the proportion of overall FY21 SR releases who found employment post-release (59%). VCE participants who found employment after release had a slightly higher recidivism rate than participants who were unable to find employment (12.3% and 12.1%, 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 male were able to find employment at a slightly higher rate than VCE participants who were female (68% and 62%, respectively). A higher percentage of VCE participants who were Black were able to find employment than participants who were White (72%, and 61%, respectively). VCE participants under the age of 30 at release had the highest employment rate of any age group (84%). Participants 60 years and older at release had the lowest employment rate after release (46%). As age at release increased, the employment rate decreased.

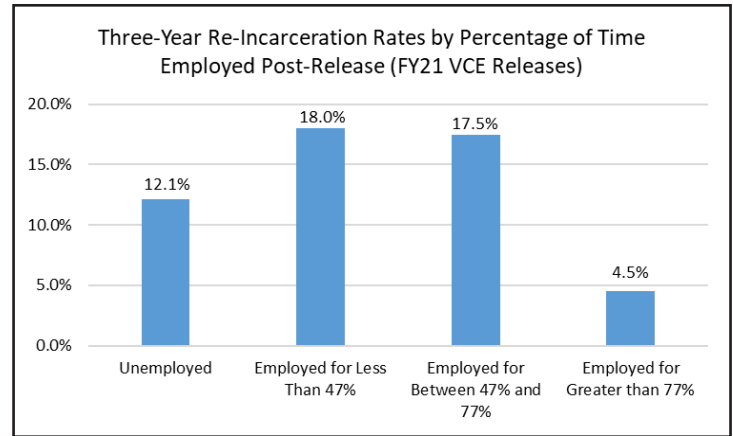
3 VADOC Research-Evaluation Unit (2026): FY2021 State Responsible Releases.

4 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.

5 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/>.

6 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.

Inmates who found employment and were employed less than 47% of the time they were at liberty during the follow-up period had the highest recidivism rate (18.0%). 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 (4.5%), which is less than one percentage point lower than the same population in the overall FY21 cohort (5.2%). VCE participants had lower recidivism rates than the overall FY21 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 317 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, \$7,323.28 quarterly (median of \$6,574.23). These participants sustained employment, on average, 59% of the time (median of 64%) they were at liberty and averaged four different employers during the follow-up period.

	Mean	Median
Quarterly Wages	\$7,323.28	\$6,574.23
Time to Employment*	1.4 Quarters	1 Quarter
Percent Employed**	59%	64%
Number of Employers	4	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 (24%), Manufacturing industry (20%), Accommodation and Food Services industry (17%), Construction industry (13%), or in the Retail Trade industry (9%).

	Total	Percent
Employment Rate	317	67%
Industry Type*		
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	2	1%
Utilities	1	<1%
Construction	40	13%
Manufacturing	64	20%
Wholesale Trade	12	4%
Retail Trade	29	9%
Transportation and Warehousing	10	3%
Information	1	<1%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	6	2%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	1	<1%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	75	24%
Health Care and Social Assistance	8	3%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	1	<1%
Accommodation and Food Services	53	17%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	9	3%
Public Administration	5	2%

*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 FY21 release term of incarceration. The largest percentage of VCE participants released in FY21 had a violent crime type (49%). Participants with a violent crime type had

higher recidivism rate (13.7%) than participants with property/public order (12.7%) or drug-related (7.3%) crime types. This differs from the overall FY21 cohort as those with a property/public order crime type had the highest recidivism rate when examining all FY21 SR releases.

FY21 VCE participants had lower recidivism rates in all three crime type categories than all FY21 SR releases. Participants with a most

serious offense that was property/public order had a higher employment rate (70%) than those with violent (66%) or drug-related (65%) crime types.

	VCE Participants*		Recidivists**		Employed After Release**	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
Overall	474	100%	58	12.2%	317	67%
Crime Type						
Violent	234	49%	32	13.7%	154	66%
Property/Public Order	158	33%	20	12.7%	110	70%
Drug	82	17%	6	7.3%	53	65%
Previous SR Incarcerations						
No previous SR terms	260	55%	22	8.5%	170	65%
1 previous SR term	112	24%	20	17.9%	82	73%
2 previous SR terms	52	11%	8	15.4%	35	67%
3 or more previous SR terms	50	11%	8	16.0%	30	60%

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 **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 FY21 had no previous SR terms of incarceration (55%). Inmates with one previous term of SR incarceration (24%) outnumbered those with two previous SR terms (11%) and those with three or more previous SR terms (11%). FY21 VCE participants had lower recidivism rates than all FY21 SR releases in all previous SR term categories. Participants with one previous SR term had the highest employment rate (73%), while those with three or more previous SR terms had the lowest employment rate (60%).

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' (45%) than those who scored 'Medium' or 'High' on the COMPAS Risk of General Recidivism scale (32% and 23%, respectively). 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 (72%).

Participants who scored 'Low' on the Risk of General Recidivism scale had the lowest recidivism rates (7.5%) and the lowest employment rates (64%).

	VCE Participants**		Recidivists***		Employed After Release***	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
Overall	474	100%	58	12.2%	317	67%
COMPAS Risk of General Recidivism*						
Low	213	45%	16	7.5%	136	64%
Medium	152	32%	25	16.4%	103	68%
High	109	23%	17	15.6%	78	72%
COMPAS Risk of Violent Recidivism*						
Low	262	55%	19	7.3%	162	62%
Medium	149	31%	25	16.8%	111	74%
High	63	13%	14	22.2%	44	70%
COMPAS Substance Abuse Needs*						
Unlikely	141	30%	14	9.9%	95	67%
Probable	114	24%	10	8.8%	80	70%
Highly Probable	219	46%	34	15.5%	142	65%

*The last COMPAS assessment during the release term of incarceration was used.
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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 31% and 13% of the cohort, respectively. Those who scored 'High' had the highest recidivism rate (22.2%). Those who scored 'Medium' had the highest employment rate at 74%. Those who scored 'Low' had the lowest recidivism rate (7.3%) and the lowest employment rate (62%).

Almost one-half of participants scored 'Highly Probable' (46%) on the COMPAS Substance Abuse needs scale. Those who scored 'Probable' had a lower recidivism rate (8.8%) than those who scored 'Unlikely' or 'Highly Probable' (9.9% and 15.5%, respectively). Participants who scored 'Probable' had the highest employment rate (70%), while those who scored 'Highly Probable' 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 FY21. 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. Although recidivism rates have slowly increased in recent years, VCE participants continue to have lower recidivism rates than the overall release cohort. 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.

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