

Julie Setele ([juliesetele43@webster.edu](mailto:juliesetele43@webster.edu))

Webster University (St. Louis, MO)

The Conditional Expertise of Formerly Incarcerated People:  
Reentry Policy-making in San Francisco

Although experiencing incarceration firsthand provides a unique vantage point on what is or is not working within the criminal justice system, rarely are the perspectives of formerly incarcerated people included in policy discussions on the topic. This paper, based on over three years of ethnographic research, examines innovative efforts in San Francisco to include formerly incarcerated and convicted people (FICPs) in criminal justice policy-making. At the Reentry Council of San Francisco, one-third of seats are reserved for FICPs, with the remaining seats held by elected officials, criminal justice professionals, and social service administrators. While one-third of seats on the Reentry Council is set aside for FICPs and, thus, they are formally included, a variety of structural and ideological barriers inhibit their participation as equal members. Analyzing the process by which FICPs are selected – and removed – from this body reveals that the ideal FICP Council member possesses specific forms of social, cultural, and symbolic capital. To overcome the stigma of a criminal record and serve effectively on the Reentry Council, FICPs must be exceptional. Though the Council seeks to pave new ground in fostering FICPs' civic engagement and reintegration, the new ground looks uncomfortably similar to the old ground.