

The Leading Edge Initiative
Former Offender Transition and Employment Program
Brief Summary

Introduction Former offenders do not generate a lot of sympathy in contemporary society. In general, they are viewed as individuals who have committed crimes and should face the consequences. The Leading Edge Initiative, specifically focused upon former offenders, is not a program of sympathy. The Initiative is one of societal economics combined with compassion, understanding, and a sincere belief that society must find a manner of employing former offenders—or pay for them in social welfare and crime-related costs, including recidivism. The Leading Edge Initiative is a program to employ and assist former offenders, both male and female, with re-entry into the workplace and society.

Background Background on the Edge commences within a much broader context—that of a criminal justice system in great need of reform. Literature on the subject abounds with reports of growth in the US prisoner population (with the highest incarceration rate of any country); the enormous societal costs involved in all aspects of the system; the inequity of a system calling for mandatory minimums for certain crimes; and, the restoration of voting rights for former offenders—all of which are the focus of actions by other individuals and organizations.

Daedalus' focus and interest is upon the former offenders and the challenges they face in attempting to reintegrate into society in meaningful and productive ways. Offenders receive *collateral punishment* as a result of their convictions in that they pose a barrier of *paramount significance* to individuals seeking employment. In essence, they receive *life sentences* for their transgressions—commencing with the scarlet letter “F” for felon—regardless of the fact that they have paid their debts to society. The tragedy is not limited to the former offenders; there are significant societal costs as a result of the inability of former offenders to obtain meaningful employment and, in some cases, any work at all.

The underlying premise of the Edge is based upon a vast amount of documentation regarding the enormous number of former offenders that are discharged from incarceration each year and the problems they face in their search for relative normalcy and reintegration into society. There are enduring societal costs of criminal activity—and there are enduring costs to former offenders. Society can reduce its enduring costs by returning former offenders to productive lives. Failure to do so will result in additional societal costs related to increased crime, recidivism, and welfare. Daedalus believes that—in most cases—former offenders who have paid their debts to society can, and will, succeed if given an unencumbered opportunity. That opportunity has to include the tools and environment to allow former offenders to flourish. Failure, for the former offender, often leads to an illogically-perceived, easier path of crime and recidivism. The fact is that there is no résumé requirement for criminal enterprises. The Leading Edge is designed to break the cycle of recidivism and to provide a path forward in

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which former offenders are given an unobstructed opportunity at redemption and recovery while reducing costs to society as productive citizens.

**Program
Overview**

The Leading Edge Initiative consists of pre-release institutional training, education, and mentoring, followed by direct employment upon release, and continuation of all forms of assistance. The Edge will provide broad-spectrum support and assistance, including employment. All former offenders are faced with the same stigma and it is in the best interests of society to help all levels of participants. As envisioned, former offenders will be employed directly by Daedalus and will be contracted to a broad section of government and industry as individuals and in groups—dependent upon requirements. In each case, a non-offender interface will be provided as a measure of comfort to organizations contracting for services. The Initiative will serve individual former offenders through pre-release preparation, education, training, counseling, mentoring, and direct employment. The Edge will also serve communities—in the broadest sense of the word, including the nation and taxpayers—through employment of former offenders that will create greater demand for goods and services; increase in the tax base; reduction of crime and recidivism; reduction in costs related to law enforcement, the judiciary, and corrections.

Important aspects of the Edge's transitional assistance are counseling, mentorship, and service. Daedalus personnel are available to counsel and mentor members on achieving success—both in life and in business. Additionally, Daedalus considers the service component of the Edge to be especially important in member's transition into a normal, productive life and an aspect in which the member's performance is as important as any other.

As envisioned, the initiative will benefit society and the former offender in a number of ways, including creation of productive, tax-paying employees and their related spending. Further, the Edge estimates that between \$35K and \$50K per year in cost avoidance will be achieved through reduction of recidivism alone. The objectives of the Initiative include a near-100% success rate of employment and reintegration of former offenders into society as productive members—an objective that will depend upon an extremely effective selection process. The Initiative will have tight programmatic controls and will provide reporting services, for which it expects to receive compensation.

Organization

The Daedalus Foundation was formed under the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1998 and is an IRS-designated 501(c)(3) non-profit, charitable organization, EIN 54-1896853. Daedalus is located in Alexandria, Virginia, in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. Daedalus is an action-oriented organization, not a think tank, rather an action tank. Daedalus personnel are very pragmatic, no-nonsense, business-oriented, problem solvers, with primary interests that include humanitarian action. Additionally, they sense a requirement and obligation to contribute to the solution of societal problems. Daedalus' personnel possess the requisite experience, education, leadership and management skills to undertake this initiative—and to prevail for the benefit of all concerned.

**Levels of
Participation**

All levels of membership in the Initiative are faced with the same challenges in transition to the labor market. Some, at the entry level, are faced with even greater challenges as they have little to offer beyond willingness to transition into productive life and to leave a life of crime and incarceration behind. Accordingly, Daedalus' levels commence with the



most difficult and include: skilled labor, journeymen, leaders and managers, professionals, HEART Corps candidates, and entrepreneurs. Daedalus entrepreneurial incubator is going to be one of the most important and exciting aspects of the Initiative. There are no limits upon the areas in which the Edge is willing to place qualified individuals, under contract, to government and industry. There are, obviously, some legal constraints that may be placed upon those levels, but that is also one of the benefits of providing contract labor with non-offender interface, federal bonding, and liability insurance.

Community Interface

An essential aspect of the success of the Initiative will be its interface with all aspects of the community—including government, industry, and faith-based organizations. A large part of that success, particularly in fundraising and direct contractual support will depend upon the image that is created by the Initiative’s management and members. While Daedalus is not a faith-based organization, the organization endorses individual spiritual, physical, mental, and professional, growth. Daedalus has strong, faith-based ties and intends to develop faith-based strategic partnerships and alliances.

Business and Financial Aspects

As with any business, The Leading Edge must operate under the strictest of business precepts and precedents to enhance its probability of success. The Edge’s business model is unique in that it is based upon the direct employment of its members to serve their interests and the public and private-sector employers, as well as grants and donations. Donations to The Leading Edge Initiative, under The Daedalus Foundation, are tax deductible. Accordingly, the Initiative will, initially, be dependent upon donations, but hopes to convert to grants and earnings from its employees as the principal sources of revenue.

Financial Requirement

Daedalus’ initial financial requirements relate directly to the level-of-effort funding required to meet the requirements for the Leading Edge Initiative for the first 36 months. Those funds will be sought through donations and grants, all of which do not have to be received in order to move forward.

Path Forward

Daedalus is seeking early support and commitment from strategic partners that have complementary interests and could benefit from alliances, including government agencies, other non-profits, and private-sector partners and sponsors—and intends to move quickly to formalize relationships and to achieve initial funding.

Initial concentration of the Initiative will be upon the geographic areas of the District of Columbia, Virginia, Maryland, and, possibly, West Virginia and will lead to a pilot project in those areas.

Daedalus looks forward to success-driven expansion and the rewards that come from doing well while doing good.

Additional information is available from The Daedalus Foundation at eam@thedaedalusfoundation.org or by calling 703 360-5700.

