



# **My Way Out**

## **Inmate Workforce Revitalization**

**Draft: June 11, 2003**

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**Executive Summary**

Imagine the transition that a recently released inmate must face when stepping out of a prison environment. The sentence has been served, but society is hesitant to welcome this new member into the community. This individual has few or no contacts, little to no training for a job and a path to the future that is very unclear. The temptation to step into criminal behavior patterns may be strong. Is there a way out?

SIM&S has seen this need in the community and created the concept of “My Way Out.” This program aims to bridge the gap between the prison and the community, by giving recently released inmates the tools to succeed. SIM&S, a Tullahoma Tennessee-based computer engineering company, realizes that to prevent the revolving door of crime, technology training can be used to develop skills, increase confidence, and reinforce positive values. The goals of this program are to halt the power of criminal behavior, and create an alternative lifestyle choice for ex-convicts. The “wheel of benefits” from this program include the following “spokes”:



- Stopping the revolving door of crime
- Developing marketable skills
- Reducing unemployment
- Creating tax payers

**Why Do We Want to Help?**

SIM&S is committed to improving conditions in Tullahoma and is creating partnerships with entities that have an in-depth understanding of the Tullahoma community. The target members of our community under this program, released inmates, have special needs to be developed in order to become productive members of society. Through partnerships, technology can be used to meet these needs through specialized training. Today’s job market has a great demand for computer skills **often lacking from ones who are incarcerated.** Encouraging the use of technology is the linchpin for entrepreneurs and workers in making a more cooperative union in Tullahoma. Through this program, SIM&S would benefit underserved community members attempting a second chance, following release from prison. The vision of this program is to bridge the gap of Digital Divide and create resources to work in the high tech environment demanded by local industries.

Creating skilled workers in the Tullahoma job market helps everyone in the community, including SIM&S. The winners include the released inmate who gains the ability to maintain employment, the citizens who no longer support the unemployed inmate, and the businesses who have a pool of qualified resources from which to find employees.



SIM&S is experienced in meeting technology requirements for customers, providing state of the art technology resources to customers, and training individuals to use technology tools to their best potential. We feel confident we can fulfill this need using our expertise. SIM&S, in business since 1992, provides computer engineering, telecommunications, network services and security services to both government and commercial customers worldwide. We have performed work for some of the hardest customers to satisfy, such as Verizon and Fort Campbell, and they have returned for more work. SIM&S has in the past donated computers to non-profit organizations, assisted inmates with job plans, provided training opportunities for the underprivileged, and manages a scholarship program. The pilot version of My Way Out was highly successful, and provides a model for the expanded resources we are proposing. SIM&S is in position to fulfill the requirements of this project.

### **Statement of Needs**

This program is necessary for our community because customized services are not being provided by the justice system to recently released inmates that fall into this target group (non violent, non-sexual related offenses). The current system does not provide job placement assistance or benefits upon release from prison. Externally sponsored programs exist both in the institutional setting and during transition phase for the released inmate, but openings in the programs are very few compared the number of inmates wanting to participate. Although the system does not provide job placement assistance, it is necessary to provide a job plan to the Institutional Parole Officer (IPO) prior to release. If the parole board approves the inmate's job plan, the information is verified with the listed employer. The inmate must initiate his/her own job search under this system. The probation officers assigned to individual cases act as intermediaries, but take a limited role in assisting the individual re-assimilate into society. Information the parole officer will typically pass along to the inmate includes housing options, a list of vocational/educational programs, mental health/rehabilitation resources, and sources for medical services.

Because the inmate population is much higher than the number of available slots in intervention programs in a correctional setting, this program is necessary to help balance the opportunities for willing participants.

In order to support the "My Way Out" program, specific needs must be met:

- Resources to send three to five participants to Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP) Training
- Establishment of a skills development center
- Equipment - SIM&S has outlined an interactive curriculum, where the participants become a part of the process upon graduation. Technology sources include the windows environment, network peripherals, media storage and media production sources. The tools participants learn to use are part of the daily corporate environment.

### **Project Description**

The target individuals for this program are recently released inmates from Tennessee prisons. These individuals must pass specific criteria in order to be considered for the program. The checklist follows:

**Candidate Checklist**

- ✓ **No violent or sexual offenses**
- ✓ **The ability to read and write in English**
- ✓ **Willingness to fulfill the requirements of the program**
- ✓ **Referral from a source in the community**

The services to be provided to the target individuals include:

- Helping develop a job plan for inmates, soon to be released
- Providing a learning structure for released inmates through both fixed curriculum and an environment focused upon developing communication skills necessary to succeed in society
- Identifying individual hurdles to be overcome in order to reenter the workplace for released inmates such as obtaining a driver’s license and finding transportation

The program’s pilot was a success in meeting the goals set forth in its launch. The participant, who we will refer to as Mr. Smith, was a recently released inmate who met the criteria for enrolling in the program. A Tullahoma church sponsored Mr. Smith during a 26-day program, during which time he received training at SIM&S, providing work for the sponsoring churches, and was given the tools and knowledge to succeed in his new environment. A lab was built to simulate current software, hardware, network and Internet technology that is representative of typical work environment. The community church project partners participated in the effort through personal interaction and status meetings to encourage Mr. Smith to reach the highest level of proficiency. SIM&S outfitted the church sponsors with funding for Mr. Smith. SIM&S also provided technology and financial training for Mr. Smith to get a fresh start, learn new skills, and enter the mainstream of the Tullahoma community as a worker. The business sponsor initially donated \$1000 for Mr. Smith’s participation in the program. Mr. Smith performed services to the church for 20 business days and four Sundays, and earned \$800. The church received \$200 for each participant to cover overhead and expenses and the church has a yearly fee to SIM&S of \$100 for IT computer engineering services. The 26-day program met these goals, kept Mr. Smith busy with an itinerary, and in the end, directed him toward a stable, full time job at an area factory where he continues to work today. The goal of this pilot was not to provide Mr. Smith with a high-tech position, as funds were not in the pilot program’s budget to provide him with Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP) training. The MCP training is proposed.

This program demands very strict discipline from the participants. He/she must arrive at the location every day, on time as required or the participant is dismissed and reported to the parole officer. In other words, one strike, and you’re out!



The program goals are not just to help the participant find a job, but to help them design a career path.

A board of directors will meet to evaluate other programs to determine similarities in approach and determine factors for program success and failure. The board will evaluate candidates, coordinate resources and establish a timeline for each participant. The basic program timeline is as follows:

Months:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Identify Candidate	█											
Program Kickoff		█										
Training			█									
Job Placement												█

**Month 1 – Identify Candidate**

- Receive the name of a candidate for My Way Out through various avenues in the community, who is still incarcerated
- Meet with the board of directors to agree on the candidate for inclusion in the program
- Contact the parole officer to discuss the candidate and determine if he/she meets the requirements and has the aptitude for participating
- Interview candidate
- Make a yes/no decision on the candidate. If the candidate is hired as a participant, the church sponsor is provided the appropriate funding, which the church will pass along to the inmate for tasks accomplished during the “skills training” phase

**Month 2 – Program Kickoff**

- Identify program timeframe, sponsorship, transportation/communication (phone) issues, and coordination with parole officer, and develop the job plan
- Begin with orientation of participant (what to expect in curriculum) and assignment of a mentor
- Assist the participant with the re-assimilation process into non-prison environment by helping him/her build peer relationships, locate missing correspondence from years of incarceration, obtain a driver’s license and obtain insurance. The participant will be given a “welcome wagon”-type package to his/her new life outside of prison .



**Months 3 through 11 – Training**

- Provide skills training – reading, writing, typing, dressing for success, basic computer skills, public speaking, resume development, interview skills, and basic financial skills (budgeting, retirement planning, grocery shopping, insurance) The participant will receive certificate of training completion from SIM&S, Inc. (3 months)
- MCP Certified Training in Atlanta (6 months)

**Month 12 - Job placement**

- Coordinate job opportunities with parole officer
- Follow up on the participant’s status of work, success in job, meeting parole requirements/parameters based upon a database to measure progress from enrollment in “My Way Out” through each phase of the project. The database captures metrics such as, course, start-date, end-date, site, instructor and other relational information. Data is collected each time a participant enters and finishes a course.
- Help the participant respond to challenges. In the event of job loss, create an “alternative work solution” based on strengths of the participant, reinforce identifiable positive attributes to create marketable skills for another job target, and identify a potential skilled trade in order to link the participant with employment

Ongoing program evaluation will include several criteria, including

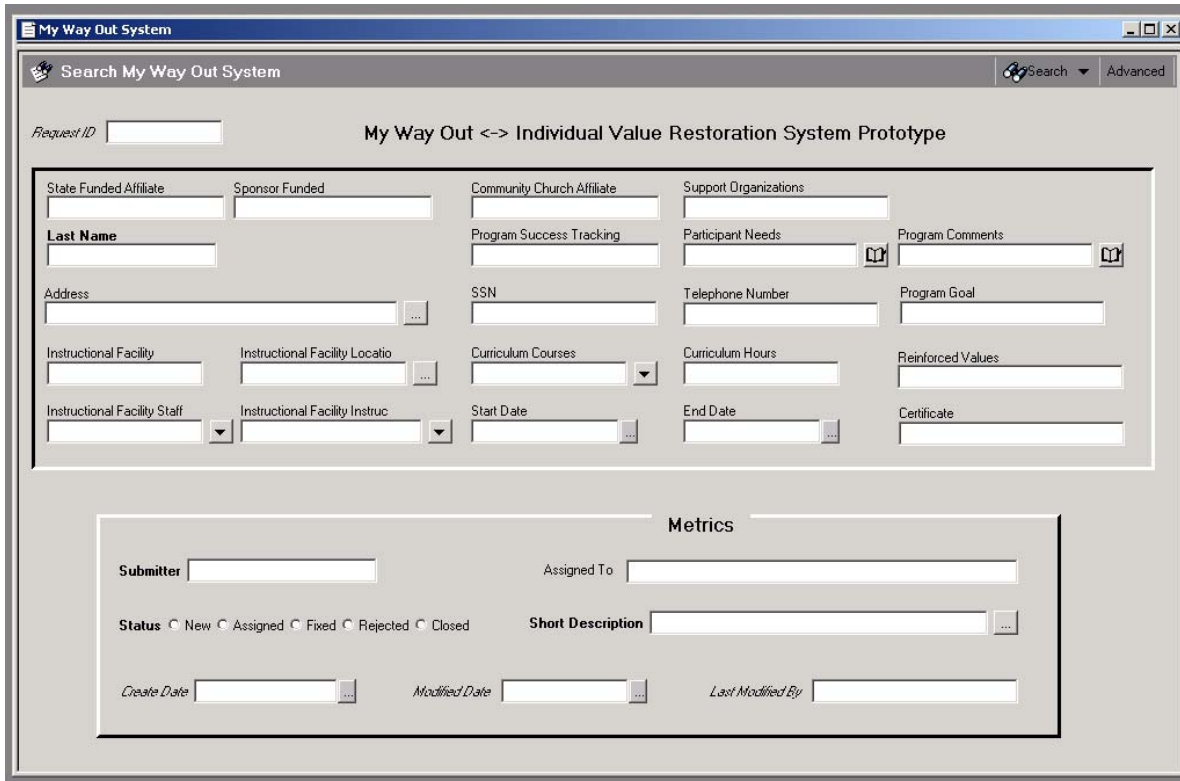
1. The success rate of this program’s participants vs. the success rate of released inmates not participating in a similar program in meeting milestones in the program.
2. The participant’s success rate of completing program milestones vs. that of other participants in the program
3. Milestones for real world success include:
  - a. Completion of training
  - b. Beginning working at a new job
  - c. Drawing benefits from job
  - d. Meets requirements/parameters of parole
  - e. Maintaining a good job record for 6 months (normal job probation period)
  - f. Not being arrested for length of parole
  - g. Keeping a job for length of parole
  - h. Graduating from the program - A productive, working, stable, law abiding member of society
  - i. Becoming a “my way out” program mentor to new participants

Milestones of the “My Way Out” program are reported in the Individual Value Restoration System (IVRS), a database to manage participant data and measure results during each phase of the program. This system is accessible to program management and is a helpful tool in evaluating the progress of the participant and the success of the program.

The anticipated outcomes of My Way Out include the following:

- Participants will have the opportunity to find regular employment in their community

- Participants will gain important skills required for both the workplace and in society as a whole as they navigate through a non-prison environment
- Participants will have a variety of resource materials to use for reference as they continue to meet challenges following incarceration
- Participants will become program mentors for incoming My Way Out participants to encourage their progress through the system



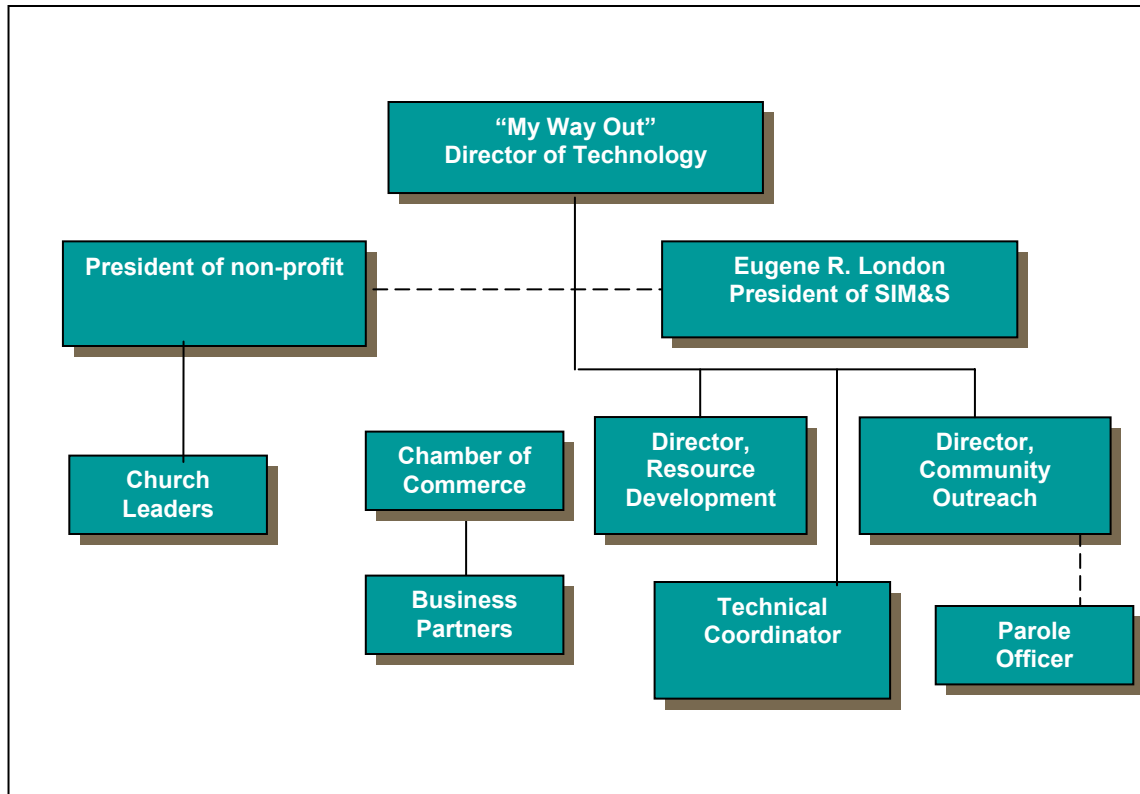
The screenshot shows a web browser window titled "My Way Out System". The main content area is titled "My Way Out <-> Individual Value Restoration System Prototype". It features a search bar at the top with a "Search" button and an "Advanced" link. Below the search bar is a "Request ID" input field. The main form is divided into several sections:

- Participant Information:** Includes fields for "State Funded Affiliate", "Sponsor Funded", "Community Church Affiliate", "Support Organizations", "Last Name", "Program Success Tracking", "Participant Needs", "Program Comments", "Address", "SSN", "Telephone Number", "Program Goal", "Instructional Facility", "Instructional Facility Location", "Curriculum Courses", "Curriculum Hours", "Reinforced Values", "Instructional Facility Staff", "Instructional Facility Instruc", "Start Date", "End Date", and "Certificate".
- Metrics Section:** Includes fields for "Submitter", "Assigned To", "Status" (with radio buttons for New, Assigned, Fixed, Rejected, Closed), "Short Description", "Create Date", "Modified Date", and "Last Modified By".

### Organization Information

The program will be implemented through cooperation of entities in the community. SIM&S has been involved actively with non-profit groups in Tullahoma on projects such as the We Care Program. That spirit of cooperation has expanded through collaboration with community church organizations to develop a venture to meet the needs of the “My Way Out” program. Participating entities will be recognized as an empowering force in Tullahoma. Pursuing this program together will support the missions of all organizations. This program will train inmates to have a skill to place them into a pool of marketable employees in Tullahoma, a benefit to the community as a whole.

SIM&S has assembled a peer-oriented board of directors for the project. The



conglomerate of talent includes SIM&S, churches, technology business partners and the Tullahoma chamber of commerce. We find that many programs are good ideas, but the best idea is the one that is converted into action.

1. **The Parole officer** is the point of contact for the participant in his/her steps in returning to society after prison, and the coordinator of the parole constraints the participant must fulfill. Program tasks include acting as a liaison with soon to be released inmate in the initial phase, helping establish parameters, helping chart success
2. **SIM&S** is a computer-engineering firm located in Tullahoma. SIM&S has provided computer, engineering, and telecommunications services since 1992. Program tasks include establishing curriculum, integrating technology tools, providing training resources, acting as a program consultant, providing website development for the churches and developing a job plan
3. **The Tullahoma Chamber of Commerce** identifies and represents the interests and advancement of its members and promotes a vision of economic growth while enhancing Tullahoma as a desirable place to live, work, and visit. Program tasks include informing employers in the community that released inmates are available for work, and helping create publicity for participating businesses that sponsor participants.
4. **Tullahoma Churches**, 501(3)(c), are non-profit organizations dedicated to the spiritual growth of its congregations, and the betterment of Tullahoma at large. The combined influence of Tullahoma area churches effects positive and sustainable change in the community. Program tasks include acting as an intermediary with the

- parole officer, assigning tasks to the program participant during the “skills training” phase, helping reassimilate the individual into society, and providing counseling
5. **The Tennessee Correction Academy** provides continuing staff development through skills and knowledge acquisition to pre-service and in-service employees and to establish positive, professional attitudes necessary for carrying out the objectives and functions of the Department of Correction. Program tasks include providing a training location, and criminology resources for program planning and evaluation.
  6. **Participating Businesses** in the Tullahoma area seek human resources. Program tasks include investing financial resources in the program, hiring inmates for work, and publicizing the program.

### Conclusion

This program will be a success for the following reasons:

- The program will halt the power of criminal behavior, and create an alternative lifestyle choice for ex-convicts
- Positive, productive values are reinforced during each phase
- The program creates self-respect as the participant interacts with society during various phases
- The program bridges the gap of Digital Divide and creates resources to work in the high tech environment demanded by local industries.
- SIM&S and other program sponsors are passionate about improving the Tullahoma community and all its members, making us highly motivated about creating success
- SIM&S has the infrastructure to accomplish this
- This helps balance the opportunities for willing participants waiting in the prison system
- Initial candidates are filtered by criteria to determine who is most likely to succeed in the program
- The concept was tested and it works. The pilot program is based upon the same principals and the proposed program will include greater opportunities for the participant due to increased resources.
- The program is organized into a milestone-oriented timeline

This program is a great idea because it will revitalize the economy. If released inmates do not find employment, then the taxpayers have to support them. The success of this program means he or she supports himself or herself. The participants get a fresh start, learn new skills, and enter the mainstream of the Tullahoma community as workers.

Individuals who are released from prison run a great risk of falling into destructive habits and reentering the system due to a depleted value system (earning money through illegal activities, etc.). If this program is not funded, there is a greater chance for an individual falling back into destructive habits and public resources will be used to incarcerate the individual again. The gap between the released inmates in Tullahoma and the mainstream community will continue to widen. Please make a commitment to fund “My Way Out” and make the dream a reality.