

# **Giving Ex-Offenders a Choice in Life: First Findings from Beneficiary Choice**

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# Presentation Overview

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- **The demonstration and its evaluation**
- **Enrollment and participant characteristics**
- **Key implementation findings**
- **Next steps**

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# The Demonstration and Its Evaluation

# What is the Beneficiary Choice Program?

- **Grantees in five cities**
  - Phoenix, Denver, Chicago, Indianapolis, Des Moines
- **Target population**
  - Ex-offenders who are 18-29 years old
  - Convicted of Federal or State crime
  - Released within past 60 days
- **Three distinct features**
  - Expansion of service delivery network
  - Emphasis on participant choice
  - Use of performance-based contracts
- **Implementation began fall 2007**

# Key Research Questions

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- **How are programs implemented?**
- **How does performance-based contracting influence implementation?**
- **How are participants ensured an informed and independent choice of providers?**
- **What services do participants receive? What is the role of faith in service provision?**
- **What are the outcomes of participants?**
- **What are the costs of the program?**

# Evaluation Data Sources

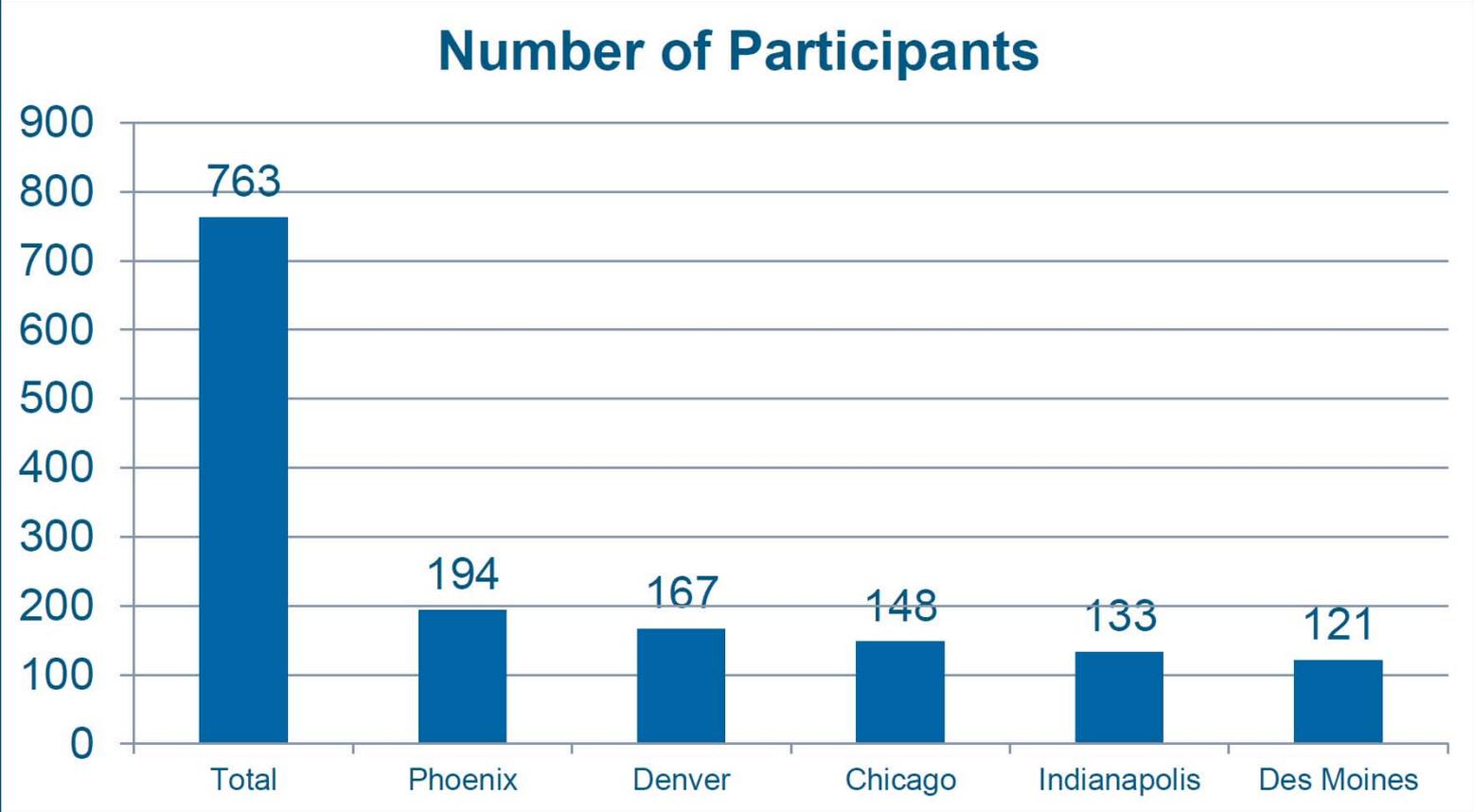
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- **Survey of grantees and providers (July 2008)**
- **In-depth site visits (July 2008 and fall 2009)**
- **MIS data (August 2008 and fall 2009)**
- **State-level criminal justice administrative data (fall 2008)**
- **Cost data (fall 2009)**

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# Enrollment and Participant Characteristics

# Enrollment by Site as of August 2008

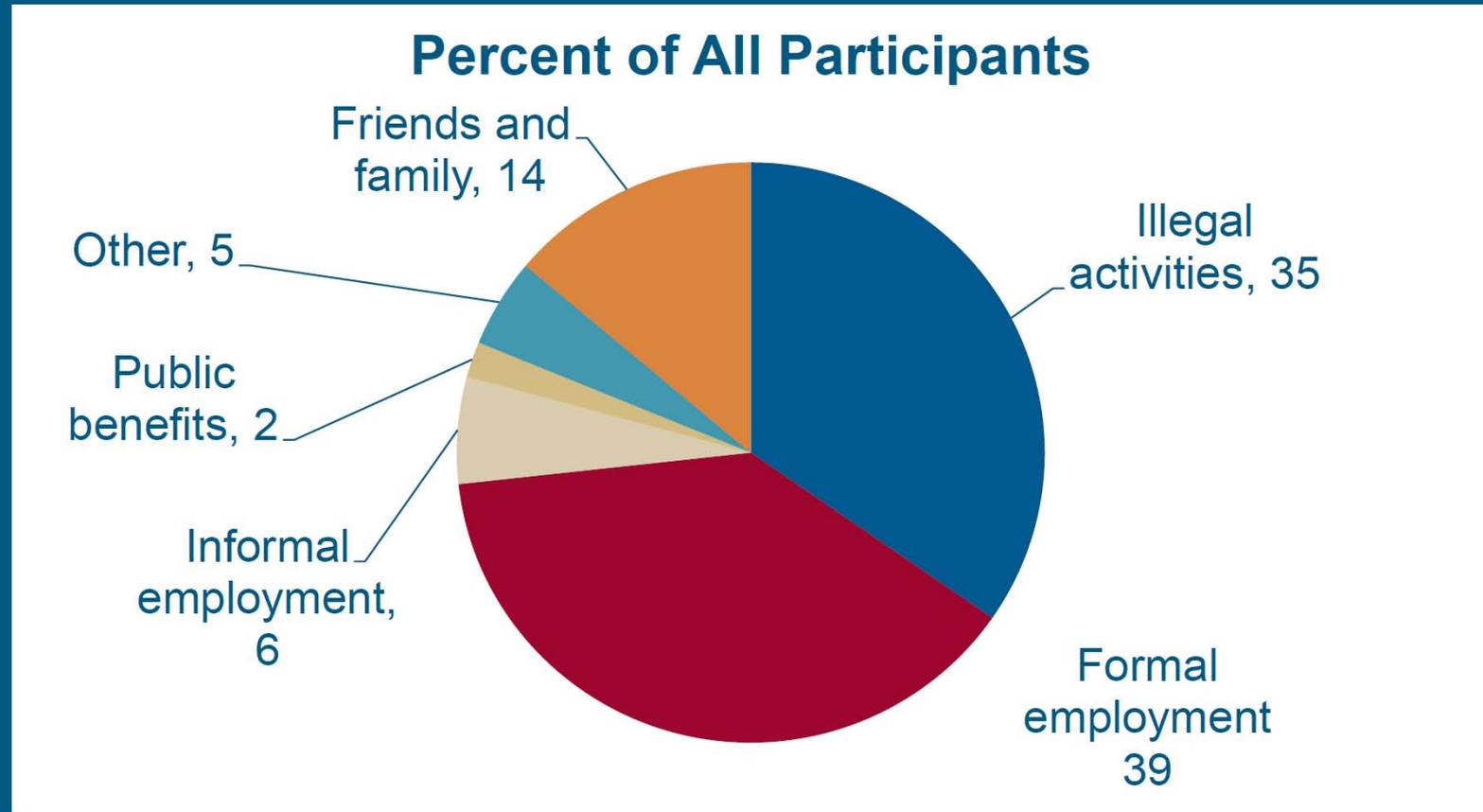


Source: Beneficiary Choice Management Information System extract dated August 15, 2008

# Participant Characteristics

- **Majority were African American men in their mid-20s**
- **Criminal histories**
  - 89 percent on parole or probation
  - 36 percent mandated to participate by justice agency
  - 71 percent nonviolent offenders
  - 2.6 years incarcerated during lifetime, on average
- **Poor work histories**
- **Range of barriers to reentry, such as unstable housing, substance abuse, transportation**

# Primary Income Source During 6 Months Prior to Incarceration



Source: Beneficiary Choice Management Information System extract dated August 15, 2008

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# Preview of Early Implementation Findings

# Key Implementation Findings

- **Further capacity-building was needed to improve service delivery and job placements**
- **The number and types of providers was limited by outreach and lack of appeal**
- **Faith-infused services did not play a major role**
- **Grantees targeted motivated ex-offenders**
- **Providers found the combination of choice and performance-based contracting very difficult**
- **Providers faced a tough balance between rapid job placement and meeting other client needs**

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# Community Capacity and Network Development

# Beneficiary Choice Expanded Service Capacity in Local Areas

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- Limited local resources for ex-offenders
- Grant infused new funds into communities
- Grantees able to serve many ex-offenders who would otherwise have gone unserved

# Community-Based Approach Built Framework for Collaboration

- **Contracts negotiated and entered at local level between grantees and specialized service providers (SSPs)**
  - Total of 30 SSPs across five sites in July 2008
  - 18 CBOs, 12 FBOs
- **Brought together agencies as a community coalition, rather than competitors**
- **Streamlined outreach and referrals**
- **In three sites, formal partnership with parole and/or probation for participant tracking**

# Capacity-Building Needed to Improve SSP Service Delivery

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- **Most SSPs are small and inexperienced**
- **Limited effort to tailor technical support to SSP needs**
- **Technical assistance primarily focused on service flow, MIS data entry and invoicing**
- **SSPs needed help strengthening networks with employers**

# Expansion of the Service Delivery Network

# Number and Types of SSPs Limited By Outreach and Lack of Appeal

- SSP network depended on total supply of FBCOs as well as outreach efforts
- Grantees relied heavily on SSPs they knew and recommendations from partners
- Few FBCOs submitted applications during open procurements
- Grant provisions may have deterred some SSPs from applying

# Some New and Unique Service Providers Engaged as SSPs

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- Gave some small, inexperienced FBCOs the opportunity to learn and grow
- Engaged some SSPs with distinctive approaches to service delivery

# Faith-infused Services Did Not Play a Substantial Role in Service Delivery

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- **Some grantees did not fully understand whether and how religious activities could be included under indirect funding rules**
- **Grantees did little outreach to faith-infused providers**
- **SSPs accustomed to direct funding may have defaulted to their traditional service approach**
- **Some FBOs reported fear that participants would not select their programs if faith-infused**

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# Emphasis on Customer Choice

# Participants May Not Fully Understand Their SSP Options

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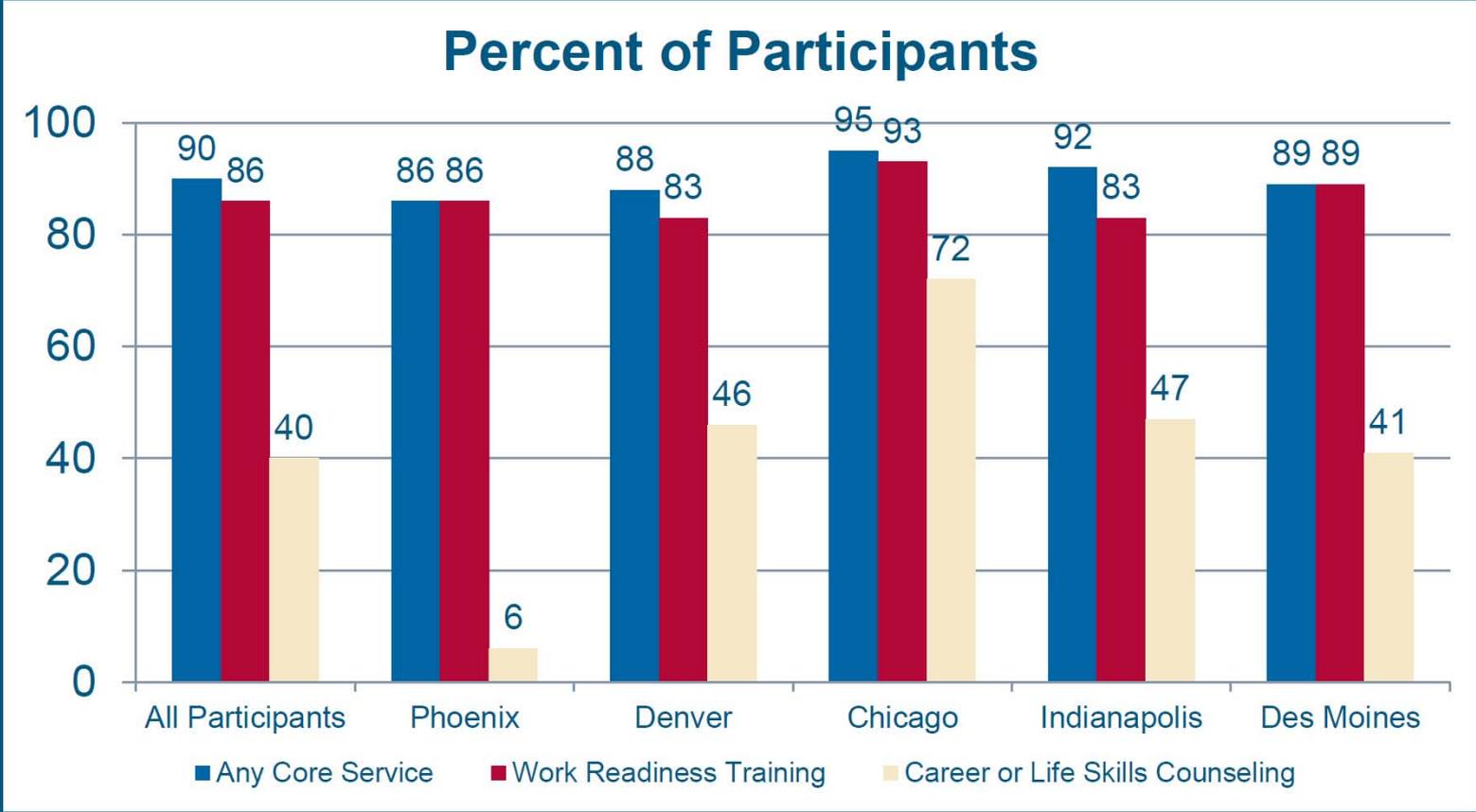
- **Participants must choose an SSP quickly, either during or immediately after orientation**
- **Only one site required participants to contact SSPs before they make a choice**
- **Most common reasons for selection**
  - Location
  - Agency reputation

# Grantees Target Motivated Ex-Offenders

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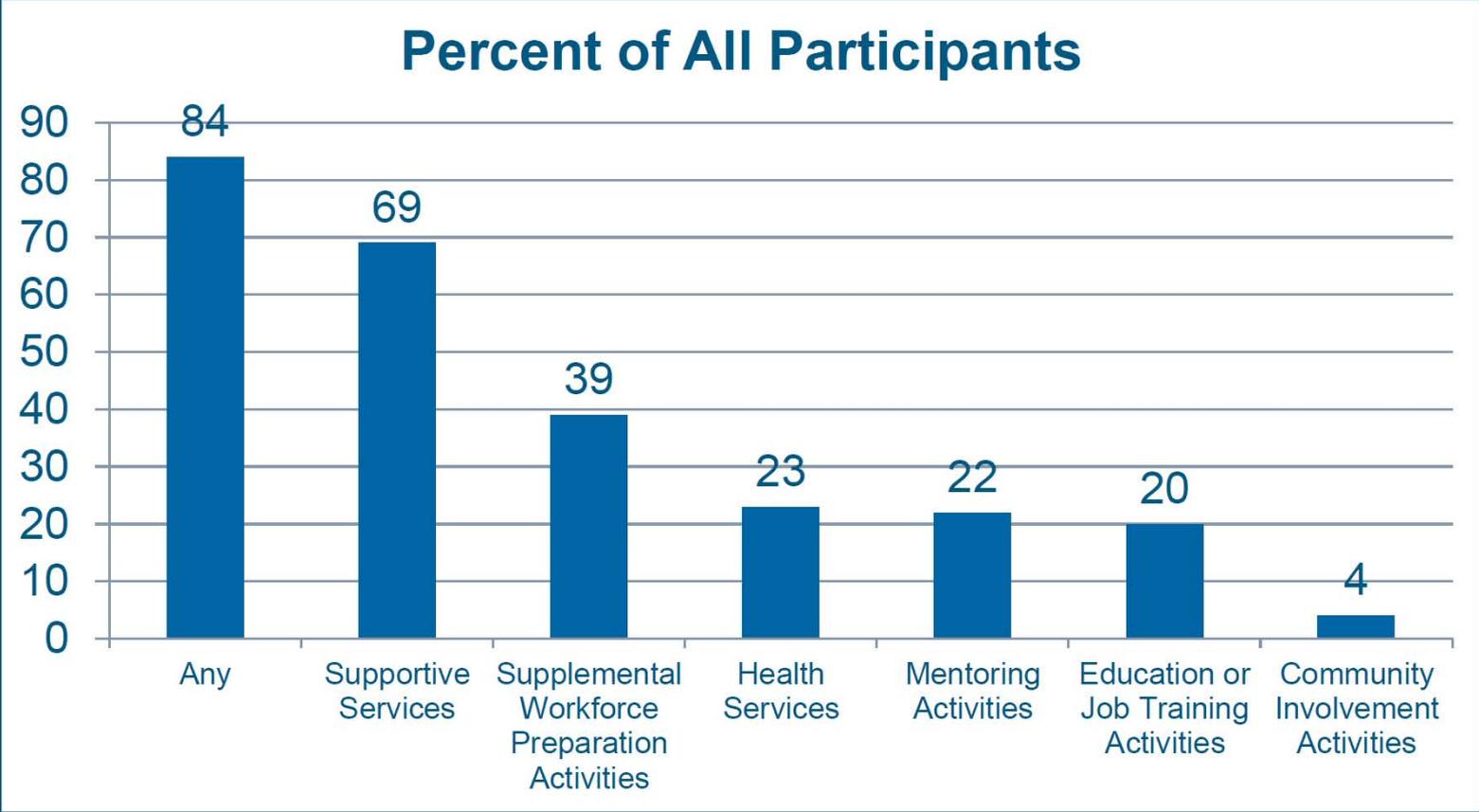
- **Staff reported significant drop-off between referral and enrollment at SSPs**
- **Those who enrolled appear to be motivated to get and keep jobs**
- **Participants who fell through the cracks may be those with highest service needs**

# Receipt of Core Services



Source: Beneficiary Choice Management Information System extract dated August 15, 2008

# Receipt of Supplemental Services



Source: Beneficiary Choice Management Information System extract dated August 15, 2008

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# Use of Performance-Based Contracting

# SSPs Found Combination of Choice and Performance-Based Contracting Difficult

- **Choice and contract structure sometimes created planning challenges**
  - Uncertainty about number of participants
  - Uncertainty about how many would reach benchmarks to allow payment
- **To minimize risk, most SSPs relied on existing staff rather than hiring new staff**

# Emphasis of Payment Points Reflect Overall Goals of Program but Vary by Site

- Two sites focused payments on service provision so small FBCOs had sufficient cash flow during early implementation
- Three sites associated the largest payments with job placement
- Three sites included other payment points related to...
  - Follow-up
  - Recidivism avoidance
  - Abstinence from substances
  - Other outcomes

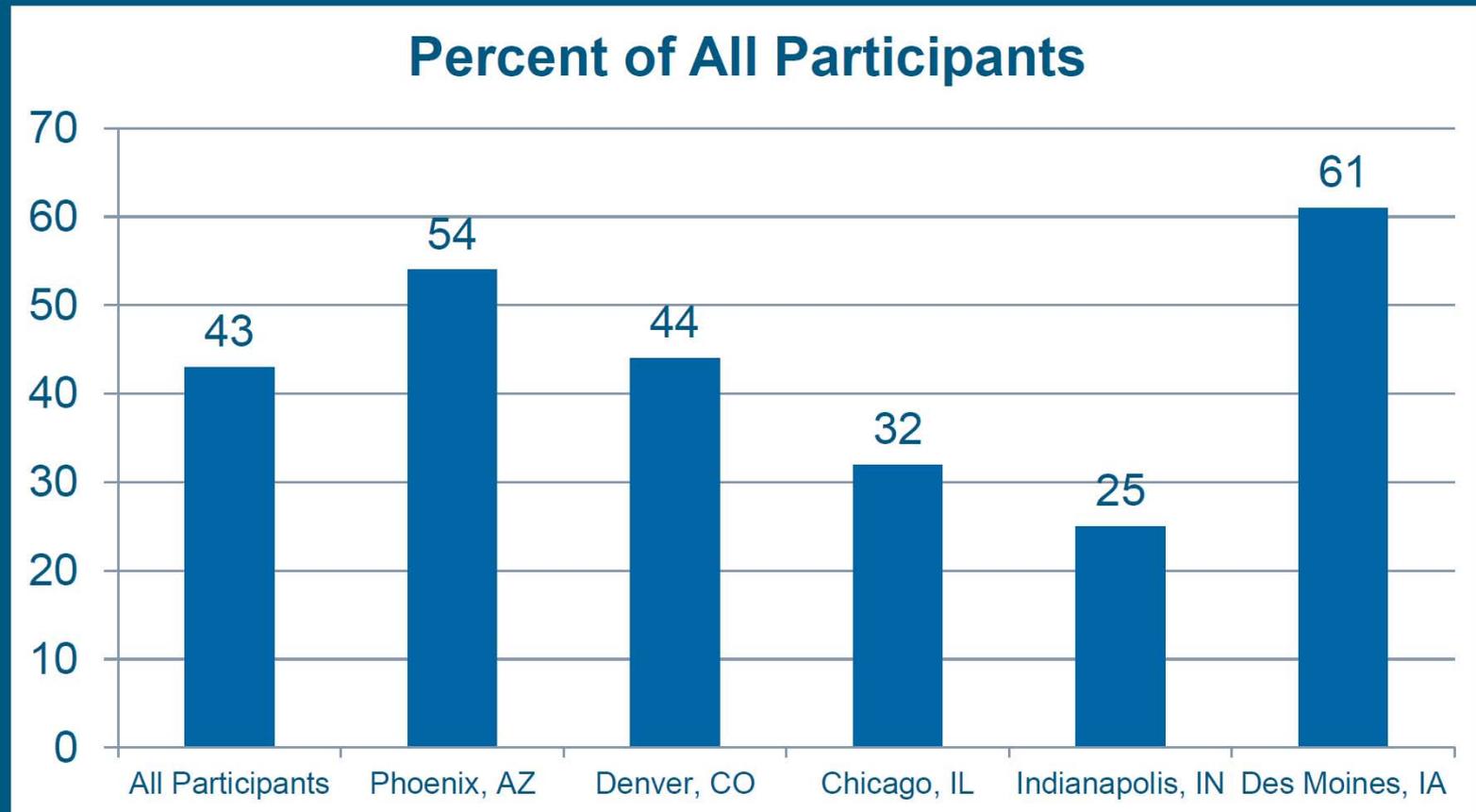
# Performance-Based Contracts Difficult for Small, Inexperienced FBCOs

- In four sites, some SSPs reported difficulties covering basic costs
- Expenditures exceeded income due to:
  - Inability to achieve placement and retention benchmarks
  - Denied payments for lack of documentation
  - Low referral numbers
- Some underestimated intensive service needs and difficulty placing those with criminal records
- Some were inexperienced with job development and had limited relationships with employers

# SSPs Face Tough Balance Between Rapid Job Placement and Meeting Other Needs

- Grant goals and payment points structured to encourage quick attachment to workforce
- Some SSPs altered existing programs to help participants get jobs quickly
  - Shift away from individualized services to one-size-fits-all model
  - Shortened or eliminated supplemental services
- In some cases, rapid entry appeared to limit program uniqueness and effectiveness

# Job Placement Rate by Site



Source: Beneficiary Choice Management Information System extract dated August 15, 2008

# Characteristics of Job Placements

- **Average of 6 weeks from enrollment to placement**
- **Average hourly wage of \$8.50**
  - Colorado had average of \$11.21 from training in asbestos abatement, hazardous materials, and forklift operation
- **Most common occupations included...**
  - Food preparation and serving
  - Construction and extraction
  - Production
  - Installation, maintenance and repair
- **High job turnover**
  - 28 percent had left their placement as of August 2008
  - 21 percent had been placed in more than one job

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# Next Steps

# Evaluation Timeline

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- **First findings report available on DOL and Mathematica websites**
- **Further data collection in fall 2009**
  - Second round of in-depth site visits
  - State-level criminal justice administrative data
  - Cost data
- **Final report due in Spring 2010**

# Key Contacts for the Evaluation

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