

Advancing Sex Offender Management Efforts Through State-Level Policy Groups

August 2010

Introduction

Just as stakeholders nationwide are striving to adopt evidence-based systems to address complex issues across a wide range of public policy areas, there is an ongoing movement to promote an evidence-based, systemic approach to managing sex offenders. One very promising mechanism through which states have sought to advance and support this important goal is the establishment of state-level sex offender management policy groups.

This document provides an overview of these policy groups, and the ways in which their efforts support the core principles and research-supported practices that can reduce sexual victimization and enhance community safety. The common features, varied roles and responsibilities, key accomplishments, and factors that influence the effectiveness of these groups are highlighted¹. This resource is developed for:

- Policymakers who are seeking information about the potential roles of these entities within a broader system of sex offender management, or who have decided to create one in their own state;
- Members of existing policy groups who would like to enhance their understanding of the work of their counterparts in other states, or to augment their current efforts; and
- Individuals who are currently – or who will be in the future – providing staff support to one of these groups.

What Matters Is What Works: Toward Evidence-Based Decisionmaking

Policymakers and practitioners working on a host of issues – including healthcare, education, the environment, homeland security, and defense –

have long appreciated the value of evidence-based decisionmaking (defined as the systematic use of quality research and other objective data to inform policies and practices) for maximizing outcomes and resources. Evidence-based decisionmaking involves multiple steps:²

- Defining the problem clearly;
- Determining what the research and local data say about the problem and potential solutions;
- Exploring options to address the problem;
- Understanding the costs, benefits, and likely outcomes of those options; and
- Making an informed decision about how best to proceed.

The criminal justice system is increasingly moving toward adopting an evidence-based approach, and frameworks are emerging to support evidence-based decisionmaking throughout the system.³ The need for an evidence-based approach specifically in the realm of sex offender management is clear – but made particularly challenging – by a number of factors, including:⁴

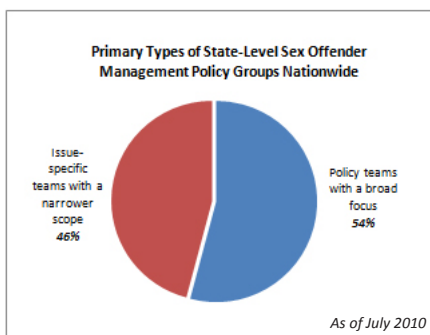
- The nature, dynamics, and impact of these crimes;
- Intense scrutiny regarding decisions made by lawmakers, agency leaders and public officials, and the professionals responsible for day-to-day offender management;
- Heightened public concerns that are often exacerbated by a lack of accurate information and media attention surrounding extreme – and rare – cases;
- Inconsistencies regarding sex offender management approaches within and across

- jurisdictions in terms of guiding policies, interventions, and fidelity of implementation;
- Growing workload demands in the face of competition for limited – and often shrinking – resources; and
- A proliferation of well-intended sex offender-specific laws for which there are growing questions about impact and effectiveness.

To help navigate these complexities, many states have established state-level policy groups as vehicles for advancing well-informed and effective sex offender management systems.⁵

State-Level Sex Offender Management Policy Groups: An Emerging Trend

Currently, sex offender management policy groups exist in various forms and structures in nearly half the states. For the purpose of parsimony in this document, the groups are categorized as follows, based on the scope and focus of their efforts:



- **Policy teams with a broad focus.** The groups in this category are primarily established or otherwise supported through legislation or governing provisions that are fairly broad and all-encompassing. For example, in 2006, California Assembly Bill 1015 created a Sex Offender Management Board to “address any issues, concerns, and problems related to the community management of adult sex offenders.” Similarly, in Illinois, the Sex Offender Management Board Act of 1997 requires the board to develop standardized procedures for the “evaluation, identification, behavior management, monitoring, and treatment” of juvenile and adult sex offenders. Other policy groups in this category – such as those in Hawai’i, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island – began as “grass root” efforts, in which independent groups of stakeholders interested in the issue of sex offender management began communicating regularly, and

subsequently developed coalitions to enhance sex offender management on a statewide level.

- **Issue-specific teams with a narrower scope.** The various groups comprising this category – commonly established through Executive Orders, agency requests or directives, or legislative mandates – tend to be charged with addressing more discrete issues or roles related to sex offender management. For example, the primary function of Ohio’s Juvenile Sex Offender Treatment Program Certification Advisory Board is to “inspect and certify” juvenile sex offender treatment programs. Idaho’s Sexual Offender Classification Board is responsible for establishing standards for psychosexual evaluations for the courts, certifying evaluators (initially and on an ongoing basis thereafter) who conduct these court-ordered assessments, and establishing the process for designating certain offenders as Violent Sexual Predators.

Funding Sources

Funding sources for state-level policy groups that receive fiscal support include the following:

- Legislative appropriations;
- Staffing and administrative support from state agencies;
- Grants from the local, state, and federal levels;
- Treatment provider/evaluator licensing or certification fees; and
- Sex offender surcharge or registration fees.

Composition and Working Structure

Because sex offender management crosses multiple agencies, disciplines, and system processes, the professionals representing these entities are critically important to the success of these groups. Typically, members include representatives from law enforcement, victim advocacy, social services/child protective services, prosecution, defense bar, judiciary, clinical evaluation, treatment, corrections, paroling authority, probation/parole, and, if juvenile sex offenders are a focus of the group’s efforts, juvenile justice and education.

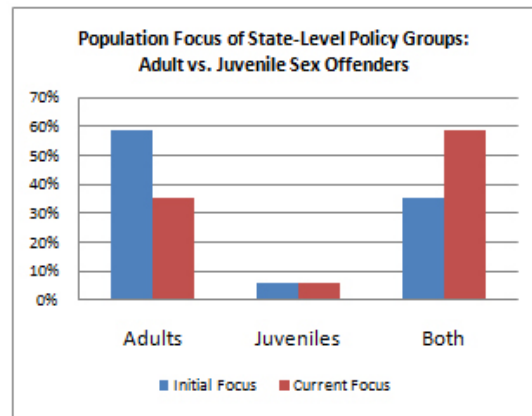
The composition of the issue-specific, more narrowly-focused policy groups tends to be less

comprehensive and diverse than the membership of policy teams that have broader responsibilities.

Members of most state-level policy groups are appointed by the legislature, governor, or governor’s designee for a specified number of years, and serve without compensation. Approximately two-thirds of these entities do, however, have one or more salaried staff members (either full- or part-time) who guide and support the work of the group.

- Public health professionals;
- Sentencing commission members;
- Federal probation officers or marshals;
- Local government officials;
- Citizens; and
- Offender representatives.

Composition of State-Level Sex Offender Management Policy Groups Nationwide		
Agency or Discipline	Broad Policy Teams	Issue-Specific Teams
Clinical evaluation	100%	63%
Corrections	100%	75%
Defense bar	89%	25%
Judiciary	89%	13%
Juvenile justice	89%	38%
Law enforcement	100%	75%
Paroling authority	100%	25%
Probation/Parole	100%	75%
Prosecution	100%	25%
Social, child protective services	78%	25%
Treatment	100%	75%
Victim advocacy	100%	75%



Adjustments in composition are also made in response to modified or newly established priorities, such as the target offender population. For example, many state-level policy groups were originally charged with addressing adult sex offenders, though a recent trend across the groups has been to expand efforts to also include juveniles who have committed sex offenses.

Most state-level policy groups convene monthly, with meetings that are open to the public. Others meet on a quarterly or bi-monthly basis. To address more specific issues, many groups have active subcommittees which typically meet more often than the larger groups. Examples of these subcommittees include:

In many instances, the composition of these groups has evolved and expanded to include additional stakeholders than had been originally specified. This often occurs when it becomes apparent – through a stakeholder analysis (see below for an explanation) or other means – that the efforts of the policy group can be better informed and further advanced by the knowledge, resources, perspectives, and skills of a previously unrepresented entity. Examples include:

- Polygraph examiners;
- School administrators;
- Housing officials;
- Researchers;
- Reentry and housing;
- Registration and notification;
- Special populations (MR/DD, females);
- Legislation;
- Standards development;
- Evaluation and data collection; and
- Public education.

State-Level Sex Offender Management Policy Groups Nationwide

State and Name of Group	Year Established	Type
Alaska: Sex Offender Oversight Working Group	2005	Issue-specific
Arkansas: Sex Offender Assessment Committee	1997	Issue-specific
California: Sex Offender Management Board	2006	Broad policy
Colorado: Sex Offender Management Board	1992	Broad policy
Delaware: Sex Offender Management Board	2007	Broad policy
Georgia: Sexual Offender Registration Review Board	2006	Issue-specific
Hawai'i: Sex Offender Management Team	1992	Broad policy
Idaho: Sexual Offender Classification Board	1998	Issue-specific
Illinois: Sex Offender Management Board	1997	Broad policy
Iowa: Sex Offender Research Council	2005	Broad policy
Kansas: Sex Offender Policy Board	2006	Broad policy
Maine: Commission to Improve Community Safety and Sex Offender Accountability	2003	Issue-specific
Maryland: Sexual Offender Advisory Board	2006	Broad policy
Massachusetts: Coalition for Sex Offender Management	1997	Broad policy
Minnesota: Governor's Commission on Sex Offender Policy	2004	Broad policy
Nebraska: Working Group on Sex Offender Treatment and Management Services	2006	Issue-specific
New Mexico: Sex Offender Management Board	2004	Broad policy
Ohio: Juvenile Sex Offender Treatment Program Certification Advisory Board	2008	Issue-specific
Oregon: Sex Offender Treatment Board	2007	Issue-specific
Pennsylvania: Sexual Offenders Assessment Board	1995	Issue-specific
Rhode Island: Sex Offender Management Task Force	2003	Broad policy
Tennessee: Sex Offender Treatment Board	1995	Issue-specific
Texas: Council on Sex Offender Treatment	1983	Issue-specific
Washington: Sex Offender Policy Board	2008	Broad policy

Key Benefits: State-Level Policy Groups Are Successful in Advancing Effective Sex Offender Management Strategies

While the governing provisions, membership, and structure of sex offender management policy groups vary, their activities generally fall into one or more of the following three areas. These areas are long recognized as core tenets of an effective system of sex offender management:⁶

- Modeling and supporting the establishment of multi-agency collaborative partnerships to ensure the integration of the various system components that play key roles in sex offender management;
- Advancing well-informed, research-supported state laws and agency policies to shape practices; and

- Providing practitioners system-wide with specialized knowledge, proper training, and skills to implement laws and policies effectively, with ongoing quality assurance mechanisms.

Modeling and Supporting Multi-Agency Collaboration

Having all of the key stakeholders “at the table” is necessary, but not sufficient, for advancing sex offender management effectively. Meaningful partnerships at all levels (i.e., state policy, local policy, and case management) that reflect true collaboration are essential for achieving an effective justice system that achieves the common vision of fewer victims and safer communities. Indeed, recognizing the importance of multi-agency collaboration in sex offender management, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking (SMART) in the Office of Justice Programs of the U.S. Department of Justice have supported the

Common Functions of State-Level Sex Offender Management Policy Groups Nationwide		
Roles and Responsibilities	Broad policy teams	Issue-specific teams
Determine alignment of state’s approaches with research and promising practices	89%	50%
Propose/develop policies	89%	75%
Coordinate, support specialized training	78%	63%
Develop standards/guidelines	78%	88%
Serve as a resource/technical advisor to practitioners	78%	13%
Conduct research on impact/effectiveness of state’s approaches	67%	38%
Develop resources (e.g., written handbooks and guides)	67%	25%
Make legislative recommendations	67%	88%
Serve as a resource/technical advisor to legislators	67%	50%
Certify treatment providers	56%	25%
Public education	56%	38%
Serve as a resource/technical advisor to agency leadership	56%	25%
Certify evaluators	44%	38%
Serve as a liaison to the media	22%	13%

efforts of more than 160 collaborative policy teams at the state and local (e.g., county, city, judicial district or circuit) levels – and in Tribal Country – through the Comprehensive Approaches to Sex Offender Management (CASOM) Grant Program during the last decade.¹

Collaboration at these different levels extends beyond activities such as networking or communicating with other agencies, exchanging information routinely, situational or episodic problem-solving efforts, or contributing resources or working alongside others to assist a particular individual or agency. Instead, it is the process of actively engaging with others for *mutual* benefit to achieve a *common* goal that cannot be accomplished alone.

State-level sex offender management policy groups can promote collaboration by:

- Adopting a collaborative sex offender management model; creating formal interagency agreements or memoranda of understanding among the state agencies that share responsibility for sex offender management (e.g., law enforcement, corrections, paroling authorities, community corrections, victim advocacy, etc.) that establish clear expectations for – and support the efforts of – the policy group at the state-level, as well as teams at the local level;
- Collectively pursuing grants – such as those associated with the SMART Office’s CASOM Program – and other funding sources to support multi-agency planning and implementation efforts at the state and local levels;
- Pooling resources to support cross-training and multi-disciplinary professional development activities that reinforce the complementary nature of multiple agencies and disciplines; and
- Using media contacts and other public education opportunities to demonstrate the importance of – and commitment to – a shared, multi-disciplinary approach to sex offender management and prevention efforts at the state and local levels.

Advancing Well-Informed, Research-Supported State Laws and Agency Policies

Crafting evidence-based laws and policies can be a time-consuming and complicated endeavor.⁷ The promising efforts underway in jurisdictions across the nation reveal that it is also a dynamic and interactive process that is dependent upon a number of factors, including:⁸

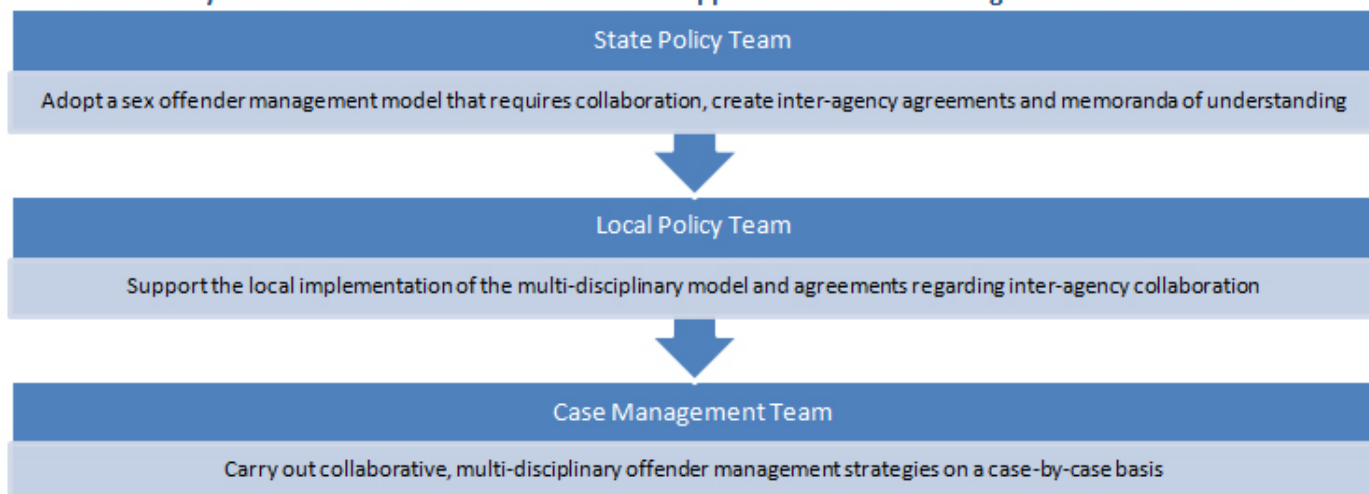
- A willingness among public officials and practitioners alike to question the status quo and critically assess current laws and policies;
- A collaborative climate in which mutual respect and trust exists among policymakers, practitioners, and researchers, and in which high standards for ethics and quality prevail;
- The identification of shared and clear goals or outcomes (e.g., reduced recidivism, decreased harm to victims and communities, increased successful outcomes for offenders, minimized collateral consequences) to be achieved by the new/revised laws and policies;
- Dedication to enacting laws and policies demonstrated to have the greatest potential to achieve the identified goals or outcomes; and
- Commitment to measuring over time whether the goals or outcomes are being accomplished, and to making modifications accordingly.

Lawmakers and other policymakers are best positioned to craft evidence-based laws and policies, and to allocate resources most effectively to address sex offender management when they – and the constituents they represent – have access to comprehensive data and information regarding:

- Adults and juveniles who have committed sex offenses in their jurisdiction, including the diversity of these populations (e.g., their recidivism risk, intervention needs);
- Individuals who are directly and indirectly affected by sexual abuse, and the varied impact on – and needs and interests of – these persons;
- What is known – and unknown – about the effectiveness and impact of interventions on increasing victim protection and public safety,

¹ For more information about the work of the CASOM grantees, visit <http://www.csom.org/about/OJPSites.html>

State Policy Teams Can Promote Collaboration and Support Sex Offender Management at the Local Level²



as well as any potential unintended collateral consequences;

- Constituents' awareness, knowledge, concerns, and interests regarding these issues; and
- The range of factors that contribute to or support sexually abusive behavior, and the strategies at the individual, community, and societal levels that can prevent it.

State-level policy groups in many states serve as a very valuable mechanism for taking on these important issues by:

- Critically evaluating laws and agency policies to explore alignment with research;
- Commissioning cost-benefit analyses;
- Conducting literature reviews or research on various sex offender-specific policies and practices;
- Serving as technical advisors or resources to lawmakers;
- Facilitating educational briefings for public officials;
- Designing complementary, research-based agency policies; and

- Engaging the public and promoting public education efforts to encourage informed policymaking.

Providing Practitioners across the System with the Tools Necessary to Implement Informed Laws and Policies

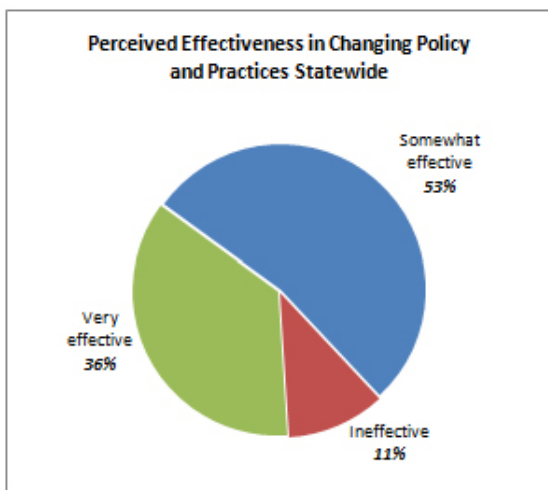
In addition to having well-informed, data-driven laws and policies, research-supported strategies must be operating – and operating *consistently* – at the day-to-day case management level. Nationwide, countless practitioners representing all aspects of sex offender management are firmly committed and dedicated to promoting safe communities and other positive outcomes. However, their practices are not always aligned with or informed by the current literature about individuals who commit sex offenses, victim-centeredness, evidence-based principles, and research-supported interventions in this field. Furthermore, some professionals may not be equipped with the specialized knowledge and requisite skills needed to be maximally effective.

This can result in case management strategies that vary widely in terms approach, technique, quality, and outcomes. For example, practice patterns in sex offender treatment programs nationwide reveal a number of common approaches that do not comport with contemporary research.⁹ Because the sex offender management field is evolving, and with new

² It is important to recognize that information exchange and other supportive functions are bi-directional, in that state-level policy teams also benefit considerably from the insights, perspectives, and feedback from the local policy and case management teams.

advances in the scientific research, professionals need ways to remain abreast of the current models and approaches that can increase the effectiveness of their work.

National organizations have taken leadership roles by integrating research and promising strategies into standards and guidelines for assessing, treating, and managing adult and juvenile sex offenders.¹⁰ In turn, many state-level policy teams have built upon these frameworks to create informed and consistent standards and guidelines in their respective states that guide and inform offender case management practices. However, the presence of standards and guidelines – in and of itself – does not necessarily translate into intended and consistent practices. Many policy teams have recognized that quality assurance mechanisms are an essential supporting element.



These teams are also working to support well-grounded, consistent, and high-quality interventions and management practices – delivered by appropriately trained and skilled, qualified practitioners – in a number of other important ways, including:

- Credentialing and certifying evaluators and treatment providers;
- Facilitating specialized training opportunities to enhance knowledge and skills;
- Disseminating/increasing professionals' access to contemporary research and practice literature; and
- Commissioning internal and external reviews of policies, programs, and services that include both process and outcome evaluations.

Many Positive and Tangible Outcomes Result from the Efforts of Policy Groups

The majority of state-level policy groups report that they have been either very or somewhat effective in influencing informed sex offender management policies and practices in their states (only 11% believe their efforts to date have been ineffective). Indeed, as a whole, the members and staff of these entities indicate that their teams have been particularly effective in:

- Developing standards and guidelines;
- Coordinating and supporting specialized training;
- Serving as a resource or technical advisor to agency leadership and practitioners;
- Conducting research on the impact and effectiveness of their state's approaches; and
- Developing written resources such as handbooks and guides.

The specific, tangible accomplishments of individual policy groups are numerous, and cannot be fully summarized in this document. The following are but a few diverse illustrations:

- Arkansas's Sex Offender Assessment Committee and Idaho's Sexual Offender Classification Board have implemented research-based, statewide sex offender assessment protocols and psychosexual evaluation standards, respectively.
- Colorado's Sex Offender Management Board – in addition to revising the management standards and guidelines for adult sex offenders – recently developed all-inclusive, research-supported management standards for juveniles who commit sex offenses.
- Hawai'i's Sex Offender Management Team has developed an innovative infrastructure to support professional development by establishing the nation's first academy devoted to providing specialized training to key agency stakeholders system-wide who share responsibility for sex offender management.
- Maine's Commission to Improve Community Safety and Offender Accountability instituted a collaborative approach to community notification across the state that includes

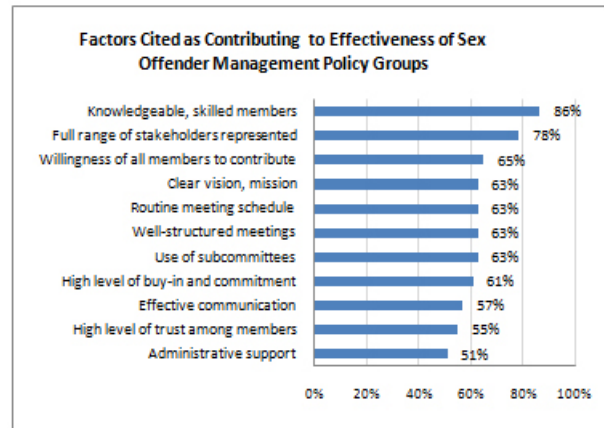
multiple stakeholders, and that provides community members with information about the problem of sex offending, the work being done by the justice system to manage these offenders, and steps that can be taken to prevent victimization.

- Texas’s Council on Sex Offender Treatment continues to apprise state legislators about the contemporary research on sex offenders and the implications for evidence-based public policy.
- Washington State’s Sex Offender Policy Board generated a research-supported report for the State Legislature on registration and community notification that included recommendations that were subsequently enacted by the legislature.

with respect to public education and serving as a liaison with the media. They indicate that the extensive media coverage of individual sex crimes is a very influential factor in shaping the public’s often negative perceptions about sex offenders in their states. They emphasize the importance of proactive efforts to educate communities about sex offenders and their management, and to use the media as one vehicle to do this.

Issues that State-Level Policy Groups Find Challenging

Overall, the staff and members of these entities report that they experience the most significant challenges



Establishment of Policy Teams at the Local Level: A Promising Trend in Sex Offender Management

Just as there are numerous examples of successful state-level policy teams across the country, many local policy teams nationwide have implemented collaborative approaches to sex offender management that include well-informed, research-supported policies and practices, as well as dedicated efforts to equip practitioners with specialized knowledge, training, and skills. The following are three illustrative examples.

Maricopa County, Arizona – The multi-disciplinary policy team in Maricopa County has been in place for more than 10 years. One team member indicates that “we are all on the same page working towards the larger goal of community safety.” Noteworthy accomplishments of this team include:

- Creating a protocol that guides a collaborative approach to managing sex offense cases across the county’s criminal justice system;
- Providing specialized, cross-agency training to practitioners;
- Working across the bounds of agency and discipline to identify solutions to the significant challenge of sex offender housing at the local level; and
- Implementing individualized and collaborative management strategies for juvenile sex offenders who have been transferred to the adult system.

Tarrant County, Texas – In the early 1980s, representatives from a group of agencies responding to issues related to sexual violence in Tarrant County determined that the capacity of agencies to respond effectively to cases of sexual abuse would be enhanced with ongoing training and oversight by a collaborative advisory committee. As a result, the Sexual Abuse Advisory Council was established in 1981. In recent years, the council has collaboratively:

- Influenced the creation of sex offender units in several criminal justice agencies, and the establishment of children’s advocacy programs;
- Developed treatment guidelines for sex offenders and victims to guide the efforts of local providers;
- Surveyed professionals across the state on the impact of registration and notification laws; and
- Pooled resources to provide specialized training to stakeholders who would not have otherwise received it.

San Diego, California – The San Diego Sex Offender Management Council (SOMC) was established in 1999 with the overarching goal of “improving public safety by looking critically at the manner in which sex offenders are identified, assessed, and managed in the community.” Members of SOMC include policymakers and practitioners from local and state agencies. In addition to formal monthly meetings, SOMC members indicate that collaboration among them is a “daily occurrence.” One member notes that “the SOMC collaboration is a testament to the vision and energy of professionals who recognized that managing sex offenders required a sophisticated toolbox of strategies, and a commitment on the part of everyone to share in the public safety challenge this population presents.” A unique feature of the group is that it is staffed by a dedicated coordinator, who is charged with supporting and chronicling the work of the team.

Factors Contributing to the Effectiveness of these Groups

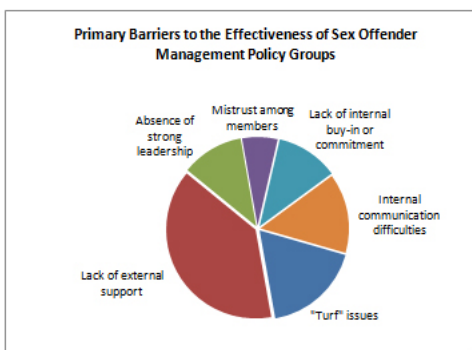
Members of these state-level teams attribute a wide range of characteristics that influenced the success of their initiatives, many of which are consistent with research on the characteristics of effective teams. When members cited the one factor that *most* contributed to their effectiveness, the following primary elements emerged:

- Representation from the full range of key stakeholder groups;
- Knowledgeable, skilled members;
- Clear and elevating vision, mission, or purpose; and
- High level of buy-in and commitment from members.

Barriers to Effectiveness

Not surprisingly, the absence of the aforementioned “effectiveness” elements tends to hamper the efforts of sex offender management policy teams.¹¹ A number of additional variables are cited by team representatives as impacting effectiveness. The various influences can be largely categorized as:

- **Internal factors**, or those directly related to the processes and functioning of the groups themselves, such as inconsistent buy-in and commitment from members, “turf” issues, communication challenges, lack of success in fostering and maintaining external support, mistrust among members, and the absence of strong leadership; and
- **External factors**, which include environmental and contextual issues such as negative media attention, limited or lack of funding, public perceptions and opinions, highly publicized sex offense cases, proliferation of sex offender-specific laws, and political exigencies.



Guidance for Building or Strengthening Sex Offender Management Policy Teams

As public officials and other stakeholders explore the issue of establishing or enhancing collaborative policy teams – at both the state and local levels – as a means of advancing an effective sex offender management system, the following practical recommendations are offered for consideration:¹²

Identify an effective leader.¹³ Strong and inspiring leadership is essential in the work of all teams, especially those that are focused on a highly visible, complicated problem like sex offender management. Effective leaders:

- Earn the respect of – and possess credibility among – team members;
- Have specialized skills and knowledge;
- Can address the “process related” needs of their team (e.g., creating meeting goals and agendas, facilitating meetings, monitoring the dynamics of the group);
- Engender confidence in those who are working on behalf of the team;
- Build morale and promote the establishment of positive working relationships among all involved; and
- Ensure that the activities of the team are integrated and coordinated.

“Get smart” about sex offenders and their management.¹⁴ A critical initial step for a newly formed collaborative policy team is to ensure that its members are well versed regarding the contemporary literature on sex offender management. While most or all team members are likely to possess working knowledge of sex offenders, and to be experts on at least one of the specific components related to their management (i.e., investigation, prosecution, and disposition; assessment; supervision; treatment; reentry; or registration and community notification), it is important for all members to possess a shared understanding of the literature that underlies each of these components. This collective understanding promotes an appreciation for the inter-relatedness of the various components, and is essential to inform

the team’s efforts to examine current policies and practices critically, and identify ways to enhance them. Because the research on sex offenders and their management is ever-evolving, all teams should make dedicated efforts to “stay smart” over time (e.g., via ongoing training on the contemporary literature and promising practices).

Mission Statement: Massachusetts Coalition for Sex Offender Management

To promote public safety and health by improving the effectiveness of sex offender management and increasing the public’s understanding of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Conduct a stakeholder analysis.¹⁵ Because efforts to enhance public safety require the involvement of a wide range of disciplines and agencies,¹⁶ it is essential that groups conduct a deliberate and structured exercise – often referred to as a stakeholder analysis – to ensure that the “right” people are at the table as the group is formed, and continuously assess the need to include new perspectives over time. In addition to having representation from multiple disciplines and agencies, it is essential that group members possess substantive knowledge and skills (i.e., technical competencies), and a willingness to work together, and share and debate ideas and divergent points of view (i.e., personal competencies).

Rhode Island’s Sex Offender Management Task Force

Vision Statement: Our vision is a coordinated system designed to enhance public safety through the effective management of sex offenders.

Mission Statement: Our mission is to develop a statewide system for sex offender management that promotes community safety through victim advocacy and services, and includes integrated criminal justice interventions, offender treatment and monitoring, as well as system and offender accountability.

Develop a shared vision, mission, or purpose.¹⁷ The various stakeholders who share responsibility for sex offender management bring many different points of view to the work of these groups. It is critically important that members work to understand and appreciate each others’ perspectives, and agree on a common purpose. It is not uncommon for members of teams to conclude that although they

approach the issue of sex offender management from different angles, they have all come to the table to work together for the same purpose – to enhance community safety and reduce victimization. One current representative of a state-level policy team states that “the most impressive aspect of this project has been to see, despite the frustrations at times, the ongoing dedication to the overall goal devised at the outset.”

Clarify roles, responsibilities, and expectations.¹⁸ It is not uncommon for groups to move forward in their work without devoting sufficient time to discussing the expectations that members have of one another regarding their roles and responsibilities on the team. A lack of clarity regarding roles, responsibilities, and expectations can create confusion among members about who is supposed to do what, and reduce the overall effectiveness of groups because the strengths that members possess may go unrecognized and unused. One strategy that groups have found to be helpful in enhancing clarity is to regularly dedicate a small amount of time to spotlight each member of the team – and the expectations that the other members have of that person. In addition, the person being spotlighted often shares with the other members his or her ideas about the skills, abilities, and interests that they bring to the team. Such an approach has a number of benefits, including the realization on the part of individual members that others on the team expect more from them than they recognized, and the identification of strengths among individual members that had been unknown to others previously, but that might significantly enhance the work of the group.

Obtain a data-driven understanding of the system, offenders, and policies and practices.¹⁹ Regardless of the purpose or scope of a policy group, it is essential that members attain a shared, data-driven understanding of the ways in which sex offenders are processed through the justice system, the characteristics of the sex offenders that are the focus of the team’s efforts, the resources that support the sex offender management process, and the current offender management policies and practices. An understanding of these four dimensions (system, offender, resource, and policy and practice) provides an important baseline for teams, and assists them to identify needs and challenges that must be addressed in order to strengthen sex offender management efforts.

Create a results-driven structure. ²⁰ It is important for team members to organize themselves in ways that will maximize their chances of achieving the results they seek (e.g., reduced recidivism, enhanced public safety). Key elements of a structure that supports successful outcomes include:

- Operating norms which describe how members will work together;
- A decisionmaking process that ensures the perspectives of all members are considered and that promotes efficiency;
- Performance measures that, if achieved, will move the group in the direction of its vision;
- A structured set of benchmarks that are measurable and demonstrate progress towards the identified performance measures;
- Routinely scheduled, well-structured, and facilitated meetings;
- Use of subcommittees to carry out special tasks; and
- Administrative support.

Practical Tips from State-Level Policy Group Representatives on Enhancing Team Effectiveness

“Make sure that the voices of new members are heard and respected.”

“If interest or commitment on the part of members is waning, talk about it openly and work together to solve the problem.”

“Make a concerted effort over time to openly identify conflicts or turf issues among members. For example, there have been many times when members have clearly and realistically pointed out why some agency and department heads might have problems with particular areas of the group’s work.”

Foster relationships with external constituents. The likelihood that sex offender management policy groups will be successful in achieving their visions, missions, and purposes is enhanced significantly if members take proactive steps to establish and maintain positive relationships with external entities that are positioned to support their work. Representatives of state-level policy groups identify state legislatures and the larger community as two important allies and, therefore, targets for proactive relationship-building efforts. The advice they offer is as follows:

- “Proactively seek direct contact with representatives from the state legislature regarding the efforts of the group. Work to foster mutually-supportive relationships with them.”
- “Involve victim advocacy organizations and seek their assistance in fostering and maintaining the support of the state legislature and other important external entities.”
- “Explore whether there are opportunities to use the media as a tool to educate the larger community proactively about the work that the group is doing.”

The Sex Offender Management Coalition

The Sex Offender Management Coalition is a multi-disciplinary group composed of sex offender management professionals (including the staff and members of many sex offender management policy groups) from across the country who are interested in furthering informed, evidence-based sex offender management policies and practices. The coalition is designed to promote information sharing among stakeholders from different jurisdictions, agencies, and disciplines. It operates a listserv and convenes periodic conference calls to discuss issues that are of interest to members.

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Appreciate that affecting change can be challenging and time-consuming. It is not uncommon for policy groups to find that making quick and significant changes in their jurisdictions’ approaches to sex offender management can be extremely challenging, and that implementing even incremental adjustments can be a lengthy process. In times of scarce resources, it may be particularly difficult for groups to make any progress, especially if the policy and practice changes they are advocating require additional costs. Unfortunately, this can impact members’ morale and level of commitment to the efforts of the team. It is, therefore, important for groups to be realistic and strategic when defining how they will move forward. One state-level policy group representative offers the following advice: “Once we created our strategic plan,

we had no resources to implement the findings. If I could change one thing in the past work of my policy group, I would have carved out some things we could have done that did not cost money and could have been accomplished fairly easily – I think that would have kept people a bit more motivated and enhanced our productivity.”

Use the experiences and work in other jurisdictions to inform current efforts. Approximately 20 years have passed since states across the nation first began forming policy groups as a method to enhance sex offender management strategies. Because it is not possible to summarize in this paper all of the important lessons and learnings that have emerged from the efforts of these groups, readers are encouraged to seek more information directly from them. Most have established websites that include contact information for their staff and members, as well as useful information regarding their past and current initiatives.²¹

Forming or Enhancing Sex Offender Management Policy Groups: Review of Key Steps

- Identify an effective leader
- “Get smart” about sex offenders and their management
- Conduct a stakeholder analysis
- Develop a shared vision, mission, or purpose
- Clarify roles, responsibilities, and expectations
- Obtain a data-driven understanding of the system, offenders, and policies and practices
- Create a results-driven structure
- Foster relationships with external constituents
- Appreciate that affecting change can be challenging and time-consuming
- Use the experiences and work in other jurisdictions to inform current efforts

Conclusion

Through the efforts of sex offender management policy teams, many states are:

- Implementing multi-agency collaboration at the state, local, and case management levels;
- Crafting more informed, evidence-based laws and policies; and
- Translating these into research-supported, high quality offender management practices.

The efforts of these state-level collaborative entities can better equip public officials to deploy limited resources efficiently and effectively, and can help to clarify the individual and collective sex offender management roles of professionals across the justice system. Moreover, as a result of the important collaborative work of these entities, external stakeholders – including victims, their families, and the broader public – can develop an enhanced understanding of, confidence in, and support for the systems that are in place to prevent sexual victimization and enhance community safety.

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Endnotes

- 1 In preparing this document, the Center for Sex Offender Management (CSOM) relied on the perspectives of the members and staff of state-level sex offender management policy groups that are currently operating, those that existed previously and whose work is now finished, and those that are in the process of forming. In addition to reviewing the written materials and websites of these groups, CSOM administered an on-line survey and received 57 responses from individuals representing policy groups in 16 states. A listserv that includes the staff and members of many of these policy groups was also queried to help to ensure that no past or current groups were inadvertently excluded from the survey or this paper.
- 2 Dunworth, T., Hannaway, J., Holahan, J., & Turner, M. A. (2008). *Beyond ideology, policy, and guesswork: The case for evidence-based policy (revised 2008)*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- 3 See, e.g., Center for Effective Public Policy (CEPP), Pretrial Justice Institute, Justice Management Institute, & The Carey Group (2010). *A framework for evidence-based decision making in local criminal justice systems: A work in progress, third edition*. Silver Spring, MD: Author.
- 4 Key reviews of sex offender-specific legislative trends include the following: Council of State Governments (2010). *Legislating sex offender management: Trends in state legislation 2007 and 2008*. Lexington, KY: Author; Levenson, J., & D'Amora, D. (2007). Social policies designed to prevent sexual violence: The emperor's new clothes. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 18, 168-199; and Velázquez, T. (2008). *The pursuit of safety: Sex offender policy in the United States*. New York, NY: The Vera Institute of Justice.
- 5 CSOM (2008a). *Legislative trends in sex offender management*. Silver Spring, MD: Author; CSOM (2008b). *Twenty strategies for advancing sex offender management in your jurisdiction*. Silver Spring, MD: Author; and Lobanov-Rostovsky, C. (2007). Sex offender treatment/management policy groups. *Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abuse (ATSA) Forum*, 19, 3-19.
- 6 See, e.g., ATSA (2005). *Practice standards and guidelines for members of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers*. Beaverton, OR: Author; CSOM (2008c). *The comprehensive approach to sex offender management*. Silver Spring, MD: Author; and English, K., Pullen, S., & Jones, L. (Eds.). (1996). *Managing adult sex offenders: A Containment Approach*. Lexington, KY: American Probation and Parole Association.
- 7 Brownstein, H. H. (2007). From an editorial board member: How criminologists as researchers can contribute to social policy and practice. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 18, 119-131.
- 8 See, e.g., Brownstein (2007); and CEPP et al. (2010).
- 9 McGrath, R. J., Cumming, G. F., Burchard, B. L., Zeoli, S., & Ellerby, L. (2010). *Current trends and emerging practices in sexual abuser management*. Brandon, VT: Safer Society Press.
- 10 See, e.g., ATSA (2005); National Adolescent Perpetrator Network (1993). The revised report from the National Task Force on Juvenile Sexual Offending. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 44, 1-120.
- 11 Research shows that the following are among the characteristics of high performing teams: shared vision, mission, or purpose; results-driven structure; representation of full range of stakeholders; skilled, knowledgeable team members; clarity regarding roles, responsibilities, and expectations; unified commitment; collaborative climate; principled leadership; and external support. See, e.g., Chrislip, D., & Larson, C. E. (1994). *Collaborative leadership: How citizens and civic leaders can make a difference*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; and Larson, C. E., & LaFasto, F. M. J. (1989). *TeamWork: What must go right, what can go wrong*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- 12 These steps and recommendations are grounded in research on effective teams, in the technical assistance that has been provided to multidisciplinary sex offender management teams nationwide at both policy and practice levels, and in the practical experiences of representatives of sex offender management policy teams. For specific guidance regarding these steps, see, e.g., CEPP (2005). *Collaboration: A training curriculum to enhance the effectiveness of criminal justice teams*. Silver Spring, MD: Author; CEPP (2007). *Increasing public safety through successful offender reentry: Evidence-based and emerging practices in corrections*. Silver Spring, MD: Author; CSOM (2007a). *Enhancing the management of adult and juvenile sex offenders: A handbook for policymakers and practitioners*. Silver Spring, MD: Author; and CSOM (2007b). *The comprehensive assessment protocol: A systemwide review of adult and juvenile sex offender management strategies*. Silver Spring, MD: Author.

13 See CEPP (2007), pp. 23-28 for more information regarding effective leadership in the justice system.

14 See CSOM (2007A), pp. 5-14 for a brief overview of sex offenders and their management. The narrative sections throughout CSOM (2007b) include more comprehensive descriptions of promising sex offender management strategies.

15 See CSOM (2007a), p. 18 for a teamwork exercise on conducting a stakeholder analysis.

16 See ATSA (2005); CSOM (2008b); and English et al. (1996).

17 See CSOM (2007a), pp. 26-27 for teamwork exercises on developing vision and mission statements.

18 See CEPP (2005), pp. 259-262 for a teamwork exercise on member roles and responsibilities.

19 See CSOM (2007a), pp. 29-43 for more information and teamwork exercises on collecting information regarding the system, offender, resource, and policy and practice dimensions. See CSOM (2007b) for questions that are designed to assist jurisdictions to examine their current sex offender management policies and practices.

20 See CSOM (2007a), pp. 44-56 for more information and teamwork exercises on developing a monitoring plan to assess progress made in achieving performance measures.

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