



National Parole Resource Center  
*Helping parole leaders meet the challenges of the future.*

# Vignettes from the National Parole Resource Center Learning Sites

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## Background of the National Parole Resource Center

Approximately 200 individuals nationwide are responsible for the release from prison of more than 125,000 offenders, and the setting of conditions and responding to violations of these offenders, for the more than 300,000 additional individuals released on mandatory parole each year. Recognizing the critical and growing importance of parole in assuring community safety, appropriate responses for victims, and the responsible use of public resources, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) awarded funding to the Center for Effective Policy (CEPP) for the establishment of the National Parole Resource Center (NPRC), to help support and shape the future of parole as an increasingly effective stakeholder in the criminal justice system. NPRC is a partnership between CEPP and the Association of Paroling Authorities International (APAI), in collaboration with BJA and the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). NPRC aims to communicate the lessons emerging from the research on recidivism reduction and to tailor that information into targeted technical assistance, training, and information resources for parole decision-makers. The mission of the NPRC is to serve as a:

- Source of information, training, and technical assistance for paroling authorities and the supervision agencies that they oversee and with whom they collaborate.
- Forum and source of support that will enable parole leadership to continue to define the evolving role of parole in a criminal justice system seeking to carry out its statutory mandates including community protection and the wise use of public resources.
- Portal to other resources for parole, beyond those directly provided by NPRC, by establishing collaborative partnerships with other public and private entities seeking to assist paroling authorities and agencies.

## Introduction to this Document

At the onset of the NPRC, the project selected four states through a competitive process to serve as “*Learning Sites*” for the project. These sites received technical assistance from the project team during 2010-2011. Nineteen states applied for consideration to be selected.

Based on the original focus of the NPRC (assistance to paroling authorities around decision-making) and subsequent collaboration with the Urban Institute (focusing on parole supervision practices), a dual structure was developed. Two of the four learning sites were designated as *Category 1*, where the NPRC assistance would be limited to assisting the paroling authority with decision-making issues. The two remaining learning sites were designated as *Category 2*, where the NPRC assistance would also address parole supervision.

In their applications, the paroling authorities chose whether they wished to be considered for *Category 1* or *Category 2*. Of the 19 applications, 2 applied for *Category 1* and 17 applied for *Category 2*. The applications were reviewed by the NPRC project team, and the team’s recommendations were submitted to the project’s advisory group for review.

The four states selected to be learning sites were Connecticut and Georgia in *Category 1* and Pennsylvania and South Dakota in *Category 2*. The NPRC work in the four learning sites is described in the remaining sections of this document.

## Connecticut

### Agency Description

The Connecticut Board of Pardons and Parole (the Board) is an autonomous executive branch agency that has sole authority for parole and pardon release decision-making (see <http://www.ct.gov/doc/cwp/view.asp?a=1520&q=284830&docNav=%7C40574%7C>). The Department of Correction (DOC) provides administrative support. The Board is composed of 18 members, a chair, five full-time members and six part-time members, and five pardons board members. Offenders released from prison on parole are supervised by the DOC's Parole and Community Services Division (PCS).

The Connecticut criminal justice system, including the Board, has experienced a period of great stress in recent years. As the result of a high profile home invasion with multiple homicides committed by two recently released parolees, numerous reforms have been instituted. The Board membership was expanded to its current complement and Board policies and practices were amended.

During the tenure of the NPRC assistance to the Board, there was a leadership change with the appointment of a new Board chair. Also during the NPRC assistance, the Board received technical assistance and training from Dr. Ralph Serin of Carleton University (Ottawa, CN) on the implementation of a new decision-making framework. Dr. Serin's work and assistance to the Board is being funded by the National Institute of Corrections. NPRC coordinated with NIC and Dr. Serin to ensure that the two efforts were consistent and complementary.

### Areas of Interest

In their application, the Connecticut Board expressed interest in addressing gaps in the use of empirical risk assessment instruments to guide parole release decisions, implementing evidence-based policy and practices for policy, targeting interventions to criminogenic needs of medium and high risk offenders, and the availability and use of graduated sanctions and intervention resources. They also identified the collection and analysis of data to inform decisions and drive performance as issues of interest.

## Learning Site Activities

The NPRC technical assistance was delivered through on-site visits on a monthly basis from September 2010 through January 2011. There was a lengthy hiatus during the Board's leadership change and the final site visit occurred in October 2011.

The NPRC assistance consisted of meeting with subcommittees to facilitate their work, reviewing documents, facilitating a strategic planning process, and delivering training.

The Board established three subcommittees to work on the three priority areas identified by the board. These were:

- Standard and special conditions
- Release decision-making guidelines
- Core competencies, vision and goals, and data-driven decision-making.

The subcommittees were composed of between ten and fifteen members, including Board members and staff, managers, and supervisors. Staff from the DOC and the Parole and Community Services division were also represented on the subcommittees. The mandate of the subcommittees was to: (1) assess current practices, (2) identify gaps and challenges in current practice; and (3) propose and implement change strategies.

Training was provided on the ten paroling authority practice targets, evidence-based practices and core competencies for Board members.

Throughout the term of the NPRC work, the consultant met regularly with the Board and executive staff to facilitate strategic planning and continuity work, partly in anticipation of a leadership change but also as recognition of the value of such work for any organization.

## Accomplishments

The Connecticut Board made progress on several fronts during their tenure as a learning site:

- To enhance their core competencies, the Board revised and updated their Statement of Organization and Procedures (operating manual). As part of that effort they developed vision and mission statements, and a statement of core values for the agency.



The Board made several changes to address gaps in practice targets:

- The review of strengths and gaps in current policies and practices resulted in the identification of several Board policies for revision.
- The Board revised and reduced the number of standard conditions of parole to six.
- The Board agreed to adopt a release decision-making framework and received training in applying the framework (in process of implementation).
- The DOC and the Board identified and agreed to implement a dynamic risk and needs assessment to inform decision-making (the Ohio Risk Assessment System or ORAS) – a serious gap the Board had been working to address for some time.

A strategic plan has been developed and agency goals have been identified for the coming year. Executive staff meet weekly as a team to monitor progress towards goals and ensure collaboration among the agency's divisions.

Lastly, the Board and DOC continue to work closely together to achieve more successful outcomes with offenders. A joint collaboration workshop regarding the implementation of the Statewide Collaborative Offender Risk Evaluation System (SCORES; based on the ORAS) has been scheduled for July 10-11, 2012.

## Lessons Learned

*Plan for change (to the degree possible).* The Board was very cognizant of the possible change in agency leadership and board members resulting from the election of a new Governor during the term of the project. The Board executive staff and Chair developed and adopted most policies prior to the change to assure their implementation. The Board included staff at all levels in subcommittee work – staff likely to still be at the Board after the change. When the change did come, there was information and a set of existing priorities for the new chair.

*Document policy and practice.* The Board learned through this process that they had very few written policies to guide staff and Board members in the exercise of their duties, including decision-making. As a result of their participation as a learning site, the Board established a process for the regular review and update of policies, and revisions to their Organization and Procedures Statement as well as key policies.

*Build in regular time for Board members to discuss issues beyond individual cases.* Board members are inundated with cases and rarely have time to discuss how they are working together as a board or how they make decisions. While the Board has provisions for regular monthly board trainings, as a group they do not have many opportunities to discuss issues related to decision-making, information they use to inform decision-making, importance of key elements of the case, or other issues. The learning site work may have been enhanced by more active engagement of all the board members.

*Collaborate with key agencies.* The Board has been collaborating with the DOC and its Parole and Community Services (PCS) division to enhance transition and reentry for some time. This collaboration has resulted in the adoption of a unified case plan, an acknowledgement that dynamic risk and needs assessment are essential to inform case planning, and more effective transition and reentry interventions. The Board is building on this collaboration as they move forward to implement the SCORES. Without true partnership among the key correctional agencies in the state, the success of their efforts would have been jeopardized.

## Georgia

### Agency Description

The Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles (the Board) is an independent executive branch agency with sole authority for parole releases from the state prison system (see <http://www.pap.state.ga.us/opencms/export/sites/default/index.html?page=index.html>). There are five full-time members of the Board, appointed by the Governor and subject to Senate confirmation. The Chairman of the Board is elected by the members. The Board is also responsible for parole supervision operations through its Field Operations Division.

### Areas of Interest

In its application, the Georgia Board identified “pre-conditions” of parole as an area with which they desired assistance. Pre-conditions are requirements imposed by the Board on inmates serving their terms of incarceration. The inmate is required to complete treatment program(s) prior to being considered for release. The logic is that the programming, such as sex offender treatment, substance abuse treatment and cognitive behavioral treatment, will address an inmate’s needs and thereby improve the prospects for successful parole outcomes in the community.

A challenge has resulted from the increase in imposition of pre-conditions by the Board (doubling between 2008 and 2010), which has outstripped the program and treatment capacity of the Department of Corrections. The increase in pre-conditions at such a rapid rate has resulted in waiting lists for program participation, failure to complete programming, and subsequently, delays in parole release, which has increased the pressure on prison populations.

The Board requested technical assistance with targeting pre-conditions on criminogenic risk factors, to ensure that the requirements are linked to reducing offender risk in the community.

### Learning Site Activities

NPRC staff provided training for the Board on two occasions, February 2 and March 21, 2011. Board members and key executive staff attended the training sessions.

The goals for both training sessions were:

- To provide an opportunity for parole board members and key executive staff to receive training on theoretical and practical parole issues in light of emerging research concerning evidence based practices;
- To receiving training on the use of risk-related tools, and to receive information concerning the development and current utilization of risk tools in Georgia;
- To receive information regarding collaboration – both within the Board and with other entities;
- To receive training regarding the imposition of conditions in light of evidence based literature; and
- To receive training on emerging research concerning the management of lower risk cases.

The February training included modules on:

- Strategic vision and direction for parole;
- Core competencies for parole board members;
- Risk assessment and evidence-based practices;
- Georgia parole's risk assessment instruments and their relationship top decision-making guidelines; and
- Collaboration and partnerships.

The March training session began with a review of key areas discussed at the February training session, including: organizational values, system consistency, messaging and public education, developing a unified case management system, pre-conditions of parole, training for hearing officers, sex offenders, and assessments and diagnostic evaluations.

Training modules for this session included:

- Opportunities to collaborate;
- Team building;
- Parole condition and evidence-based practices;
- Effective parole supervision; and
- Effective parole decision-making.

## Accomplishments

The Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles took full advantage of NPRC technical assistance to achieve several major accomplishments. These included:

- The provision of intensive training for Board members and key executive staff. The five member board had three new members who needed training on the Board's policies and operations. The intensive training over two days also provided an update for the experienced members of the Board. The training content was broader than just Georgia specific practices and provided updates on parole practices and developments nationally. The training provided the Board members with the opportunity to have extended discussions about their individual perspectives and thought processes on release decision-making and condition setting. This sharing and discussion provided the opportunity to begin to build a more coherent, effective, and efficient set of practice guidelines and policies.
- The Board members and key executive staff learned about actuarial risk instruments and their role in release decision-making, and the application of these tools to their own population of offenders.
- The training provided information on evidence-based practices and parole release and supervision. The Board was particularly interested in low risk offenders and how to best manage them in the parole process.

## Lessons Learned

*Take time to meet informally as a Board.* While it is important that the Board comply with the law and regulations regarding meeting of public agencies, it is important for the Board to have time to meet and discuss parole policy and practice, decision-making philosophies, and other matters.

*Work to stay abreast of developments in the field.* The field of parole specifically and corrections generally is developing and evolving rapidly. It is also important for the Board to receive regular training to stay current with emerging developments and practices in the field.

*Collaborate with partners to improve effectiveness.* The extensive imposition of "preconditions" of parole on inmates in the correctional facilities has had an unanticipated result. So many inmates have conditions that mandate the completion of treatment or other programs prior to parole release that the demand has outstripped the ability of the DOC to provide programming. This has resulted in the continued confinement of inmates who might otherwise be released. More judicious use of preconditions, particularly for low risk offenders, could relieve a significant portion of this problem.

## Pennsylvania

### Agency Description

The Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole (the Board) is an independent executive branch agency with sole responsibility for the parole release, revocation, and reparole decisions for inmates in the state correctional system (see <http://www.pbpp.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/home/5298>). The Board consists of nine full-time members, appointed to six year terms by the Governor with the advice and consent of the state Senate. The Governor designates the Chairman from the Board members. The Board also has 17 hearing examiners who assist the board members with release and revocation decision-making. The Board is also responsible for parole supervision of state inmates through its Office of Probation and Parole Services.

Pennsylvania law provides for a traditional discretionary parole system. The sentencing judge sets the minimum and maximum terms, and the Board considers inmates for release at their minimum term.

In addition to the responsibility for state parole, the Board also has some administrative responsibilities for county probation and parole departments. The county departments provide parole supervision for offenders released on parole from the county prisons. The parole release decision for these county cases is made by the sentencing judge. The Board's responsibilities for the county departments include administering a grant-in-aid program, monitoring department compliance with the accreditation standards of the American Correctional Association<sup>1</sup>, providing training and collecting statistics. The Board also provides probation services to two counties that do not have their own probation department.

As the NPRC work began, the Board was emerging from a multi-year period of significant turmoil. In September 2008, then Governor Edward Rendell requested a moratorium on parole releases, following the murders of two Philadelphia police officers by a parolee and a halfway house resident. As a result of this request, the Board suspended parole releases at that time. The Governor appointed John S. Goldkamp, Ph.D. of Temple University's Department of Criminal Justice to conduct an independent investigation of the correctional and parole system's performance. After a preliminary

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<sup>1</sup>American Correctional Association (2010) Performance-Based Standards for Adult Probation and Parole Field Services. 4th ed. Alexandria, VA: author.

report that largely validated the Board's practices, the moratorium was lifted for non-violent offenders and was subsequently lifted completely. Dr. Goldkamp later issued an extensive report of the investigation, providing significant affirmation of the Board's practices and making recommendations for improving the handling of violent offenders.<sup>1</sup>

During the NPRC work, the Board was also engaged with Richard Berk, Ph.D. of the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Berk has developed a new statistical model for forecasting violence among the offender population.<sup>2</sup> Based on violence forecasting work done in Philadelphia and Maryland, the Board engaged Dr. Berk to develop a model for use with Pennsylvania inmates. Improving the Board's ability to assess the risk of future violence has been an area of concern, and became an urgent priority with the moratorium and the Goldkamp investigation.

## Areas of Interest

In its NPRC application, the Board indicated its interest in addressing a number of areas. These included full implementation and integration of evidence-based practices across the agency, review of the reentry strategies and structure to ensure optimal impact, facilitating the transition of supervision from an enforcement oriented model to an evidence-based risk reduction model, and reviewing and refining the Board's efforts on technical parole violations.

## Learning Site Activities

The NPRC technical assistance activities commenced with a site visit in September 2010. Following a meeting to introduce the NPRC to all Board members and key staff, NPRC staff worked separately with the Board members and with a group of executives and managers from the Office of Probation and Parole Services. In these meetings, the two groups began to develop and refine the agenda for the work of the Board as a NPRC learning site.

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<sup>1</sup>Goldkamp, John S., et al. (2009) Parole and Public Safety in Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: Temple University. [http://www.pbpp.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/reports\\_and\\_publications/5358/specialized\\_reports\\_and\\_articles/518497](http://www.pbpp.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/reports_and_publications/5358/specialized_reports_and_articles/518497).

<sup>2</sup>Berk, Richard, Lawrence Sherman, Geoffrey Barnes, Ellen Kurtz and Lindsay Ahlman. (2009) "Forecasting Murder Within a Population of Probationers and Parolees: A High Stakes Application of Statistical Learning" Journal of the Royal Statistical Society (Series A) 172, part 1: 191-211.



## The Board and Hearing Examiners

A major focus of technical assistance was on the further implementation of evidence based principles into the Board's decision-making practices and, in particular, assuring a clear interpretation and commitment to these principles among the nine Board Member and 17 Hearing Examiners. A number of key accomplishments resulted from a series of task group meetings involving both members of the Board, as well as Hearing Examiners who bear certain decision-making responsibilities as delegated by the Board. The task group, affirmed by the entire Board, agreed on the following goals for the technical assistance effort:

- To revisit the Board's decision-making philosophy as a guide for current and future decision-makers;
- To explore together how professional judgment is currently used in the decision-making process and to agree on whether and how the Board and its hearing staff could clarify, structure, and document its use;
- Provide an opportunity for decision-makers to discuss and consider together aspects of their work, including agency strengths, accomplishments, challenges and capacity; national developments in the parole field; and
- Develop and agree on a set of proposed actions to help the Board better use and communicate about its decision-making practices.

The Board and selected hearing examiners met in Harrisburg on a monthly basis. The sessions were facilitated by NPRC staff.

The process concluded with a two-day retreat in State College, Pennsylvania in March 2011 for the full Board and all of the hearing examiners. The agenda included:

- Review of Recent Challenges and Progress
- Review of the Board's Decision Philosophy
- Technical Violations
- Setting Parole Conditions
- Professional Judgment
- Case Decision-Making Scenarios
- The Blueprint for the Future



## Supervision

In the years just prior to the NPRC work, the Board had invested heavily in the implementation of evidence-based practices for supervision. In June 2010 (just prior to the start of the NPRC work) the Board convened a meeting of the statewide parole supervision management team. At that meeting, the staff focused on implementation of the 13 Strategies for Parole Supervision<sup>3</sup> and identified needs and priorities for completing implementation.

At the initial NPRC technical assistance meeting, the supervision group began by identifying ten major issues related to supervision. After a thorough discussion, the group distilled the ten areas down to three: case planning, training, and caseload/workload concerns. Three working groups were established to address these issues. The groups were composed of managers, supervisors, line agents and central office staff, and headed by a regional director. The groups met monthly in Harrisburg from October 2010 through February 2011 and were facilitated by the NPRC consultants. The monthly meetings included some time spent in plenary session and in individual groups. The groups' recommendations are described below.

### Case Planning Recommendations:

- Begin to place more emphasis on case planning as a process as opposed to a form or event.
- Develop/adopt a case planning form that better accommodates this approach.

### Training Recommendations:

- Enhance evidence-based practices skills-based training in the Basic Training Academy.
- Reinforce evidence-based practices skills through revisions to the On-the-Job Training Packet that is used in the agent's field assignment following graduation from the Academy.
- Utilize ongoing training strategies to ensure that evidence-based practices skills-based training is delivered and reinforced throughout an agent's career.
- Provide additional training opportunities for non-agent staff so that their supporting roles can strengthen the agents' use of evidence-based practices skills.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411791\\_public\\_safety\\_first.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411791_public_safety_first.pdf).

### Caseload/Workload Recommendations:

- Ensure that offenders are receiving the right level of supervision and intervention.
- Ensure that time is wisely spent on those offenders presenting the greatest risk of reoffending.
- Utilize technology to enhance supervision practices.
- Increase district flexibility for agent assignment to assure maximization of agent resources.
- Examine several administrative time-saving measures.

The process concluded with a two-day retreat in State College, Pennsylvania for the statewide parole management team. The agenda included:

- Presentations on the working group reports
- Responding to technical violations
- Case planning
- Setting conditions of parole
- Assessment overrides
- Case planning scenarios

### Accomplishments-Parole Decision-Making

- The Board reviewed the recent past and reflected on the process and outcomes of the parole moratorium and the independent investigation. They realized that the cohesiveness of the Board was one of its core strengths. The importance of openness and transparency was emphasized. The performance-focused, data-driven approach of the Board facilitated communication with the Governor's office, the independent investigator, the media and the public about the parole process overall and the specific cases under investigation.
- The full review of the Board and Department of Correction's policies and practices was conducted by a team led by Professor John Goldkamp of Temple University. Dr. Goldkamp recommended some changes in the Board's approach to which the Board adopted—including a new guideline categorization of violent offenders - but found much of existing policy and practice basically sound. The willingness of the Board to cooperate with the review and be receptive to the recommendations of Dr. Goldkamp was significant, and was quite consistent with what would

be expected from an agency that has engaged consultants extensively for system improvement in recent years.

- The Board reaffirmed the importance of its decision framework. It is a coherent, evidence-based decision-making model that provides clarity of purpose and process, consistency, fairness and transparency.
- The Board's efforts on technical violations of parole were also reviewed. Implementation of the Violation Sanctioning Grid has reduced returns to prison without compromising public safety. This helps to reduce the pressure on prison population and makes wise use of that expensive resource.

The Board developed a series of targets for change for the future. These will build on the success of work done to date and continue the commitment of the Board to improve its performance.

## **Accomplishments-Parole Supervision**

The statewide parole supervision management team – central office staff and field managers and supervisors – spent a great deal of time, both prior to and during the NPRC work, assessing their implementation of the 13 Parole Supervision Strategies. Beginning with the June 2010 meeting and continuing through to the March 2011 retreat, these staff spent many hours reviewing, discussing and strategizing about how to move the agency to full implementation of the 13 Strategies. This investment has produced a number of accomplishments.

- The first is a detailed set of recommendations concerning the three priority areas (case planning, training and caseload/workload concerns.) These recommendations were submitted to the Board Chair and director of the Office of Probation and Parole Services for review. A number have been accepted and implemented and the others are under active consideration.
- The second accomplishment is the development of a broad base of knowledge and expertise among the members of the statewide parole management team about the details of the 13 Strategies, the Board's efforts to date to implement them, and the challenges that implementation poses to the agency. Such knowledge better equips the staff to deal with the challenges at the local level and to be effective change agents and advocates for the new model of parole supervision.
- The third accomplishment stems from the statewide parole management team's concerted efforts to meet during the first year of the project. The parole staff saw first hand and could understand the Board's commitment to the implementation of evidence-based practices in parole supervision.

In both of the statewide meetings, significant time was spent by the parole leadership in dialogue with the attendees from around the state about the challenges they were facing with implementation at the local level. Additionally, the leadership sought input from the field staff about their needs and recommendations to further the implementation of the 13 Strategies. This involvement and direct communication is critical to successful implementation.

In addition to the work with the parole management team, the NPRC consultant developed a report on the implementation of the 13 Parole Supervision Strategies. Prepared at the request of the Board's chairman, the report provided a detailed assessment of the implementation of each of the 13 Strategies in Pennsylvania and provided specific recommendations for further work. The recommendations have been incorporated with those of the three NPRC workgroups to form a comprehensive blueprint for improving parole supervision in Pennsylvania.

## Lessons Learned

### Release Decision-Making

*Statewide collaboration and public education is crucial.* The Board learned that its efforts to collaborate with other agencies and to proactively engage stakeholders and constituents in an educational process about parole returned huge benefits when the Board was under attack and intense scrutiny as the result of the murders committed by parolees.

*There is inherent value in being a data driven organization.* The Board has made a significant investment in its data collection and performance measurement capacity. This has enabled the Board and staff to regularly monitor the full range of agency performance, and readily answer questions about the agency and its work.

*The importance of transparency cannot be underestimated.* The Board has been open with its data and performance information, which has enabled stakeholders, constituents, the media, and the public to have insight into how the parole process works and performs.

*There is always room for improvement.* The Board has regularly engaged outside resources – including consultants, public policy organizations and academics – to assist in reviewing, critiquing and refining all aspects of the Board's work. This commitment to continuous quality improvement has resulted in the creation of an organizational culture where the norm is to examine processes and seek ways to make them work better.

*Internal collaboration is also critical.* Within the agency, there are natural work groups that could easily become insular and isolated. These include the Board itself, the hearing examiners, the data management unit, and the parole supervision staff. The Board has recognized and made great strides to ensure that all of these groups collaborate routinely to address mutual issues.

*The Board should recognize its power as a policy team.* While the members of the Board are individual gubernatorial appointees, they routinely work as a policy team to address issues and challenges that face the agency. This team approach builds the Board's capacity to effectively govern the overall parole process.

*There is significant value in pursuing evidence-based practices.* While significant time and resources have been invested in the implementation of evidence-based practices in both release decision-making and supervision, the Board recognizes the inherent systemwide value of those efforts.

## **Parole Supervision**

*Implementation of evidence-based practices is a long term endeavor.* The work to implement evidence-based practices in parole supervision has been underway for more than six years. While much progress has been made, it is clear to the leadership of parole supervision that there is still more work to be done.

*Successful implementation requires alignment of key organizational components.* Through the discussions during the NPRC process, the parole supervision staff realized that training, human resources, and information technology all had significant, if not yet articulated, roles to play in successful implementation of the 13 Strategies.

*Organizational culture must be addressed.* Organizational culture is a powerful factor in shaping employee behavior. Shifting a parole supervision agency's mission from monitoring and enforcement to risk reduction through behavior change is a significant undertaking. If the culture is not addressed and aligned with the new mission, organizational change will lag behind and could be jeopardized.

*Training and coaching of line parole agents is critical.* For the full impact of evidence-based practices to be realized, the work of the parole agent must change in significant ways. Agents must learn and master a complex new set of skills. This is most effectively accomplished through intensive training in natural work groups, with opportunities to practice. In order to be maximally effective, the training should be followed up with ongoing coaching and mentoring by the first line supervisor.

## South Dakota

### Agency Description

The South Dakota Board of Pardons and Paroles (the Board) is a nine member body that serves part-time (see <http://doc.sd.gov/parole/>). In contrast to most parole boards, the members are appointed by three different sources. Three are appointed by the Governor, three by the state Attorney General, and three by the state Supreme Court. All appointments are subject to the advice and consent of the state Senate. Members of the Board serve staggered, four-year terms.

Self described as a “citizen board”, the members meet one week per month to hear cases and perform any administrative duties. The Board is housed within and administered by the state Department of Corrections (DOC), but carries out its decision-making responsibilities independently of the DOC. The Executive Director of the Board is appointed by the Secretary of Corrections. Parole supervision is provided by the DOC’s Division of Parole Field Services Unit.

As in many states, the Board’s jurisdiction and workload have been affected by changes in the state’s sentencing laws. The state adopted a determinate sentencing model, where the sentencing judges sets the length of the sentence and initial parole dates are calculated through application of a statutory grid factoring crime classification (seriousness) if the crime of conviction is violent or non-violent and extent of criminal history (number of felony convictions). In these cases, the conditions of parole are established by the Executive Director and the offender is released on parole if they are compliant in prison, agree to their supervision conditions, and have an approved release plan. The Board has jurisdiction on the determinate cases when a parolee’s supervision is revoked and re-incarcerated and those cases where the inmate is not compliant in prison. The Board determines when to release and what conditions to impose on the parolee.

The Board has release jurisdiction for parole release on inmates serving sentences under the prior sentencing law (before 1996), functioning in a traditional discretionary release mode.

### Areas of Interest

In their application, South Dakota described recent activities in the state, including the establishment of a Governor’s Reentry Council in March of 2009. With the publication of *Putting Public Safety First: 13 Parole Supervision Strategies to Enhance Reentry Outcomes* in 2008, the Secretary of



Corrections embraced the 13 Strategies model and directed the Division of Parole to implement it. In 2010, the Secretary of Corrections established a goal of reducing parolee recidivism by 50% within five years. The Division of Parole had begun to implement elements of the 13 Strategies, but this recidivism reduction mandate increased the urgency to complete implementation in order to meet the goal.

The Board identified improving the pre-release case management process as priority, including targeting treatment services to better prepare inmates for release and creating a “seamless” handoff from the institution to field parole staff, with moderate and high risk offenders receiving priority for receiving treatment and programming.

The Board also requested assistance in making better use of information being provided to them as part of the parole process, including risk assessment, release plans and treatment and programming information. They also were interested in better tailoring parole conditions to individual offender needs.

## Learning Site Activities

The learning site activities in South Dakota included series of site visits and a training retreat with Board members and DOC parole staff.

In October 2010, NPRC staff conducted the first site visit, which began with a plenary session with the Board members, key Board staff, and key staff from the DOC’s Division of Parole Field Services unit. This session presented information about the project and laid out the overall approach for the technical assistance. Detailed presentations were then made on the 10 Paroling Authority Practice Targets and the 13 Strategies Parole Supervision Strategies.

Following the plenary session, the attendees split into two groups, Board and parole supervision. NPRC staff worked with the individual groups.

The Board group focused on the decision-making process and identified a number of areas in which they determined that training and assistance would be beneficial. The areas included articulating decision-making values and beliefs, understanding risk assessment and its role on release decisions, using other assessment tools to assist in decision-making, interviewing skills for parole hearings, and the imposition of conditions as part of the release process.

The parole supervision group focused on the status of the Division's implementation of the 13 Strategies. A detailed assessment was developed and needs for supporting further progress were discussed.

In December 2010, the NPRC consultants returned to South Dakota. The parole supervision group reviewed the draft technical assistance report that had been prepared from the prior meeting. Revisions were made to the report, which contained the detailed assessment and specific recommendation for moving the implementation further toward completion.

In February 2011, a day and a half training retreat was held with the Board and the parole supervision group. The NPRC consultants provided information and training on risk assessment, data-driven decision-making, conditions of supervision, violation of parole decision-making and special needs offenders. Throughout the sessions, the attendees discussed the implications of the presentations for parole policy. The training concluded with a discussion of next steps for the South Dakota Board.

At the request of the Board's Executive Director, a report was prepared on the implementation of the 13 Parole Supervision Strategies. The report provided a detailed assessment of the implementation in South Dakota and provided specific recommendations for further work. In June, the NPRC consultant presented the report to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Corrections and key Parole Division staff.

## **Accomplishments-Parole Decision-Making**

The NPRC Technical Assistance provided the Board with an opportunity to examine their work in depth, and dedicate time to asking questions, having discussions, and identifying priority training needs.

The NPRC consultants facilitated this process, helping to identify and deliver training to address the Board's interests and concerns. As a result, the Board received training that covered the following areas.

- National Overview of Parole
- Board Decision-Making: Values and Beliefs
- Risk Assessment: Nationally and in South Dakota
- Using Data and Information When Making Decisions



- The Hearing: Interviewing Skills and Reviewing the Structure
- The Purpose of Standard and Special Conditions of Parole
- Special Needs Offenders: Sex Offenders and Offenders with Behavioral Health Issues
- Effective Supervision and Violation Decision-Making

The training was also attended by the Board's administrative staff and key parole supervision staff. This ensured that all parties were current on the latest information, and resulted in a number of extensive discussions of policy and practice. The discussions provided the opportunity to ensure that all involved understood the reasoning and logic behind policies. A number of issues were identified as needing further discussion and work.

## **Accomplishments-Parole Supervision**

The NPRC technical assistance provided the South Dakota parole supervision staff with the opportunity to examine and assess their implementation of the 13 Parole Supervision Strategies. The Parole Division had been working at implementation for some time and had accomplished a great deal. In fact, the review team that assessed the applications for NPRC participation ranked South Dakota quite highly in terms of the extent of implementation.

The initial assessment identified several key areas that needed attention. These included the overall challenge of meeting the recidivism reduction goal, and more specifically: performance management, violations of parole, risk and need assessment, case planning, case management techniques, conditions of parole, and coordination between institutional case manager and field parole agents. The review of policy and operations that the report was based on involved a "vertical" slice of the field services unit, including line parole agents, supervisors, and the director. These staff provided a variety of perspectives and their input both enriched the discussions and enhanced the final product.

In addition to the technical assistance report delivered to each site, the Executive Director of the Board requested that the NPRC consultant prepare a report on the 13 Strategies implementation for the Secretary of Corrections. This report, which was presented to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Corrections at a meeting in June 2011, provided a detailed assessment of the state of implementation in South Dakota and provided specific recommendation for each of the 13 Strategies.

## Lessons Learned

The lessons learned in South Dakota reflect the challenges of implementing large scale organizational change in a complex government environment. In many ways, they are similar to challenges faced by organizations in other jurisdictions.

*Effective collaboration is critical.* Dealing with the offender population in the parole environment involves at least three major organizations – correctional institutions, the Board, and the parole field services unit. In many bureaucracies, units and organizations often build strong boundaries between themselves and others. These boundaries tend to restrict the flow of information, reduce communication, and make collaboration difficult, if not impossible. Building a seamless system to effectively and efficiently move inmates from confinement back to the community requires effective collaboration across organizational boundaries.

*Challenge of systems integration should be expected.* The systems of individual units, the policies, procedures and practices, are often developed in isolation from partners. This results in systems that are not well integrated at best and entirely oppositional at worst. Achieving systems integration requires an overarching purpose and willingness to design systems that are complementary and fully integrated at all levels.

*Evidence-based supervision practices are central to public safety.* The 13 Parole Supervision Strategies emphasize the critical role of risk and need assessment and targeting criminogenic factors in offender supervision. Implementing these strategies requires an agency and its staff to embrace a risk reduction model of supervision that is based on identifying and reducing criminogenic factors.

*Implementing change will not be without challenges.* Undertaking large scale organizational change, such as the implementation of the 13 Parole Supervision Strategies, is a substantial undertaking that will require an organization to commit staff and resources over a multi-year period. Implementation will touch every aspect of the organization, from line parole agent practices, to training, to human resource policies, to performance management practices and organizational accountability. The leadership of an agency undergoing this process must also be cognizant of the effect on staff of such a long period of seemingly continual change.



## For More Information About the National Parole Resource Center

The National Parole Resource Center web site, [www.nationalparoleresourcecenter.org](http://www.nationalparoleresourcecenter.org), provides further information about the project resources, partners, types of assistance, contact information, calendar of events, news, and a compilation of key literature of concern to paroling authorities and their supervision partners.

To learn more about the project and the resources it has to offer, contact:

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