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A Strategic Approach to Responding to Parole Violations

Goals of this Guide and How to Use It

This Action Guide, *A Strategic Approach to Responding to Parole Violations*, is designed to assist parole Board members considering the development, modification, or improvement of their parole violation systems by developing more effective responses to violations, and improving parole violation decision making. It is one in a series of Action Guides developed by the [National Parole Resource Center \(NPRC\)](#) and builds upon NPRC's [Self-Assessment Toolkit for Paroling Authorities](#), an online guide that identifies [ten practice targets](#) paroling authorities should consider implementing to assist them in achieving their public safety and risk reduction goals.

Each Action Guide addresses a different practice target and provides parole Board members the opportunity to consider each of the targets—explained in the Toolkit—in more depth. It is strongly recommended that parole Boards use the *Toolkit* as a first step before using this Action Guide—or any of the Guides in the series. The *Toolkit* reviews all of the practice targets, their basis in research, and engages the user – through a series of questions – in a process of considering broadly how they see their current practices in each area. The Action Guides then support a Board in moving toward significant practice improvements in each area.

This Action Guide is intended to assist parole Board chairs, members, and staff to:

- Develop an understanding of contemporary research and "best practices" regarding parole supervision and responses to violations;
- Establish consensus regarding the overarching philosophies, goals and objectives and Board expectations for responding to violations of parole supervision in their jurisdiction;
- Develop a shared understanding about the current philosophies and decisionmaking processes and the extent to which they align with "best practices;"
- Consider the potential significance and implications of specific parole conditions and supervision requirements on parole compliance and outcomes;
- Review parole violation options that might be utilized in order to best "match" offender violations with appropriate responses;
- Identify potential ways to enhance or streamline the structure and practice of parole violation decision making, and consider opportunities to empower staff to make parole violation decisions that are consistent with the Board's expectations;
- Explore the value of using a parole violations decision making tool to, among other things, improve consistency of response; and
- Consider what changes the Board would like to make and how to best plan and implement those changes.

This guide is presented in the following sections:

- [Tab 1: Goals of this Guide and How to Use It.](#)
- [Tab 2: Background and Context](#) provides an introduction and provides a historical context for responding to parole violations, provides information about the number of parolees under supervision and the number of parole violators returned to prison in the U.S., and explores the inter-relationship between parole conditions, parole supervision approaches, and responses to parole violations.
- [Tab 3: Understanding the Philosophy and Evidence about Responding Most Effectively to Violations](#), provides a brief overview of evidence-based supervision approaches, the emergence of more effective responses to violations, the structure of efficient parole violation systems, opportunities to utilize objective risk-based tools to improve parole violation decision making, and outcomes associated with changes made in parole violation systems.
- [Tab 4: Moving Toward Implementing Practice Improvements and Performance Measurement](#) details seven steps, highlighted in a graphic "roadmap," that Boards can take to develop and implement change strategies to improve current policies and practices regarding responses to parole violations. The steps include a set of questions that, if answered accurately, will provide a snapshot of key aspects of these practices. This section also provides examples of policies regarding parole violations that other Boards have elected to adopt. The section includes a sample action plan format and tools to guide parole Boards through a process of revisiting/updating the goals they hope to accomplish, and defining/implementing changes they agree must be made in policy and practice. It closes with a plan to measure performance and offers considerations for defining and measuring progress toward success, and using measurement feedback to continue strengthening practice going forward.
- [Tab 5: References/Endnotes](#) provide documentation of the literature and research upon which this Action Guide is based.
- [Tab 6: Links](#) lists helpful resources used by NPRC in assembling this Action Guide and that are recommended for those wanting to supplement their knowledge on this topic. The listings in this tab provide direct links to web-based resources.

This project was supported by Grant No. 2010-DJ-BX-K140 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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Background and Context

Each year, approximately 400,000 individuals are released from prison and placed under parole supervision – accounting for approximately 59% of all releases from prison in 2011 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012). Over 800,000 offenders are currently under parole supervision in the United States. Despite some recent and welcome reductions in community supervision populations nationwide, in 2011, one in every 50 adults in the United States was under supervision in the community by a probation or parole agency (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012).

To promote successful outcomes and increase public safety, this very significant population of offenders is largely managed by parole officers (or agents) who provide oversight to parole cases by:

- Conducting assessments;
- Developing case plans;
- Making appropriate treatment and service referrals;
- Counseling and interacting with parolees to encourage compliance with conditions;
- Utilizing incentives and other means to encourage successful outcomes;
- Collaborating with community partners (e.g., treatment or other service providers, collateral contacts, families); and
- Responding appropriately to violations of supervision conditions.

This Action Guide focuses primarily on the last responsibility noted above – the effective response to parole violations. Parole violations involve the failure of the parolee to properly abide by the conditions of parole that have been imposed by the releasing authority or other appropriate entities. These violations may involve the commission of new crimes, failure to comply with a term of release with no additional crime being committed ("technical violations"), or some combination of the two. This area is one that warrants attention because rates of successful parole completion have decreased considerably in recent decades, and this decline can be at least partially attributed to returns to custody for parolees who fail to abide by the terms and conditions of their release. From 1984 to 2005, a significant decline in the number of parolees successfully completing parole occurred – dropping from 60% to 45% (Greenfeld, 1984; Glaze and Bonczar, 2006). Recent studies have indicated that this downward trend in success rates for parolees has continued - with 33 per 100 completed supervision cases reporting successful outcomes in 2011, down from 34 per 100 in 2008 (Maruscha and Parks, 2011). If current trends continue, states are likely to see increasing numbers of parole and probation violators admitted to prison. There is a considerable percentage of violators who could be managed in the community, thereby freeing up prison beds that could be used for more dangerous offenders. This approach – of incarcerating violators who are determined to be higher risk – helps to diminish risk to public safety and reduces unnecessary correctional costs (Burke, Horowitz, & Gelb, 2007).

Even modest levels of violations resulting in return to incarceration—or more importantly—failures resulting in new crimes, generates significant costs to the community and impact upon victims. In light of this, in recent years, an approach to supervising individuals in the community has begun to emerge. It is a model that is evidence-based and requires a shift from a system focused solely on compliance with conditions to one of targeted efforts to enhance successful, law-abiding completion of supervision. It recognizes that many offenders will violate their conditions of supervision one or more times and largely acknowledges that responses are most effective when they are delivered quickly and when the actions taken seek to positively change, rather than punish, behavior (Carter, 2011).

Some of these offenders are returning to lock-ups for committing new criminal acts. Others are revoked to prison for violations of their parole and probation conditions, non-criminal offenses such as missing appointments or failing drug tests. A growing body of analysis and experience suggests a strategy that can boost the success of people on parole and probation, keeping them crime- and drug-free and thereby saving more prison beds for violent, serious and chronic offenders. Some states return a high percentage of probationers and parolees to prison for breaking the rules of their release; others do not. The decision to seek revocation of community supervision can be inconsistent, the result of wide variability in staff members' interpretation of when revocation is appropriate. Revocation rates also vary widely within a single state—high in one region, much lower in another—and even among judges and parole officers in the same district. This raises questions about evenhandedness and fundamental fairness. It also suggests a significant opportunity to be more strategic in using the power to revoke release.

When Offenders Break the Rules: Smart Responses to Parole and Probation Violations (Available at <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/0001/01/01/when-offenders-break-the-rules>)

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Understanding the Philosophy and Evidence about Responding Most Effectively to Violations

The analysis of promising practices from a number of jurisdictions and research that forms the basis of evidence-based practices has helped to identify specific actions that appear to be significantly related to improved success rates for offenders under supervision. This research has helped to focus attention on the value of using particular risk-reduction and behavior modification strategies, rather than simply focusing on monitoring compliance with the terms of supervision. Overall, the new emphasis has been on finding ways to engage in supervision work that helps to prevent or avoid violations, while also finding effective ways of responding to violations that do occur, reserving options that involve incarceration for the most serious types of circumstances. Evidence-based literature has helped to identify key elements of violation response approaches that, if followed, appear to promote more successful offender outcomes. These key elements are:

- A clear and consistent understanding of the importance of these elements and the steps to be taken when responding to offender behavior increases the likelihood of successful completion of supervision. In order to provide consistency throughout a jurisdiction, the following concepts should be considered when developing and applying responses to offenders' behaviors:
- All violations should be responded to in some way (See: Grasmack & Bryjak, 1980; Nichols & Ross, 1990; Paternoster, 1989).
- All responses to violations should be swift and certain. (See: Grasmack and Bryjak 1980; Nichols and Ross 1990; Paternoster 1989; Paternoster et al. 1997; Rhine 1993; Von Hirsch 1993; Burdon et al., 2001; Dayan & Abbot, 2001; Griffith et al., 2000; Higgins & Silverman, 1999; Marlowe & Kirby, 1999; Murphy, Vuchinich, & Simpson, 2001).
- The level of risk and severity of the behavior should be considered when determining an appropriate response to violation behavior (see, e.g., Carter, 2001).
- A response to an offender's behavior that best addresses the criminogenic needs and issues presented by the

Certainty

Future behavior is significantly influenced by the degree to which an individual believes their non-compliant behavior will be noticed. When individuals believe that their non-compliant behavior will be identified, they are more likely to act in a compliant manner. Therefore, all violations should be responded to in some manner. (See, e.g., Grasmack & Bryjak, 1980; Nichols & Ross, 1990; Paternoster, 1989).

Celerity

Reducing the time between the violation and the response to the violation is critical. The closer in time the response occurs, the greater the impact it will have on the future behavior of the parolee. (See, e.g., Rhine, 1993).

offender should be considered (See: French and Gendreau, 2003, Andrews, 2007; Andrews et al., 1990).

- To the extent possible, responses to offenders' behaviors should assist them in identifying their strengths and goals through the use of Motivational Interviewing (See: Walter, Clark, Gingerich, and Meltzer 2007).
- Positive offenders' behaviors should be consistently reinforced through the use of verbal affirmations, positive reinforcements, rewards and incentives four times more than sanctions for violations (See: Andrews & Bonta, 1998; Bandura, 1977; Cullen & Gendreau, 2000; Drake & Barnoski, 2008; Latessa, Cullen, & Gendreau, 2002; Gendreau & Goggin, 1996; Higgins, & Silverman, 1999; National Research Council, 2007; Petersilia, 2007; Petersilia, 2004; Taxman, Soule, & Gelb, 1999; Wodahl et al., 2011).
- A response that is minimally necessary to sanction the violation and assist in moving the offender towards positive change should be considered (See: for a discussion of proportionality, Von Hirsch, 1993).
- Risk to the community and/or victim should be considered as an overriding issue when considering a response to behavior (see, e.g., Andrews and Bonta, 2008; Carter, 2001).
- Technical violations may be handled more efficiently administratively rather than in the courts or before the Board (see, e.g., Carter, 2001).

To help to meet these goals, many paroling authorities and supervision agencies have developed and implemented revised approaches to responding to violations ([click here](#) for examples of states' approaches to responding to violations). These policies encourage the use of lower-level response options (e.g., increasing supervision contacts, reprimands, appropriate referrals) when low-level technical violations are present that do not appear to involve significant public safety concerns. To assist with consistency in the application of these various sanctions, and to incorporate key policy considerations such as offender risk, several paroling authorities have developed a violation response tool that can be used to guide the use of violation response options.

Lessons from jurisdictions that have made these and other significant changes to their violation response systems suggest that there are a number of key elements that successful violations response strategies should include, such as:

- A clear refocusing of the vision and mission of community supervision from a traditional focus on monitoring compliance with conditions of supervision to a strategy that supports successful completion of supervision through the use of a risk/needs/responsivity approach;
- A realization that—in order to achieve major change in vision, mission, and operations- a significant change implementation effort must be undertaken. Change strategies should be built upon the lessons emerging from implementation science—including the need to equip staff, not only with training, but with coaching and with opportunities to practice the new skills being required of them;

Consistency

Similar responses to similar circumstances improves the likelihood that a person will comply with expectations. The presence of policies, guidelines or decision making tools can help to promote or improve consistency (See, e.g., Paternoster, Brame, Bachman, & Sherman, 1997).

Neutrality

Processes that are perceived by others to be impartial, logical and fair yield increased adherence to rules. When rules seem to be applied in an arbitrary fashion, or when there is no predictability to responses, then rules are followed less often (Tyler, 1990).

Parsimony

Punishment should not be more intrusive or restrictive than necessary to accomplish the objective (Tonry, 1996).

Proportionality

The level of punishment should be commensurate with the severity of the behavior or the circumstances of the offender (Von Hirsch, 1993).

Risk and Need-Driven

Use risk to reoffend as a key factor in determining the appropriate level of response; tailor responses to address the individual's unique criminogenic needs (Andrews and Bonta, 1998).

- A realization that sanctions, alone, are not effective tools to change motivation and behavior, and that other strategies must be built into an agency's approach, including
 - incentives and reinforcers for positive behavior;
 - problem solving responses that are specific and guided by risk and needs assessments available as responses to violations; and
 - referral sources from which to obtain the interventions appropriate for various levels of risk and need;
- Quality assurance tools to track performance under this new approach, and an automated data base to provide leadership, supervisors, and line staff with real time feedback regarding offender behaviors and system efforts to address offender behavior so that implementation can be tracked, guided, and reinforced (see, e.g., [Georgia](#)); and

Improved collaboration and information sharing with key criminal justice partners, community service providers, courts, and other critical entities to ensure consistency in the approach taken to the management of offenders in various programs or sanctions, to create new options or expand existing supervision and violation responses to behavior, and to improve the nature and quality of information that is shared between individuals and organizations involved in the management or provision of services to offenders.

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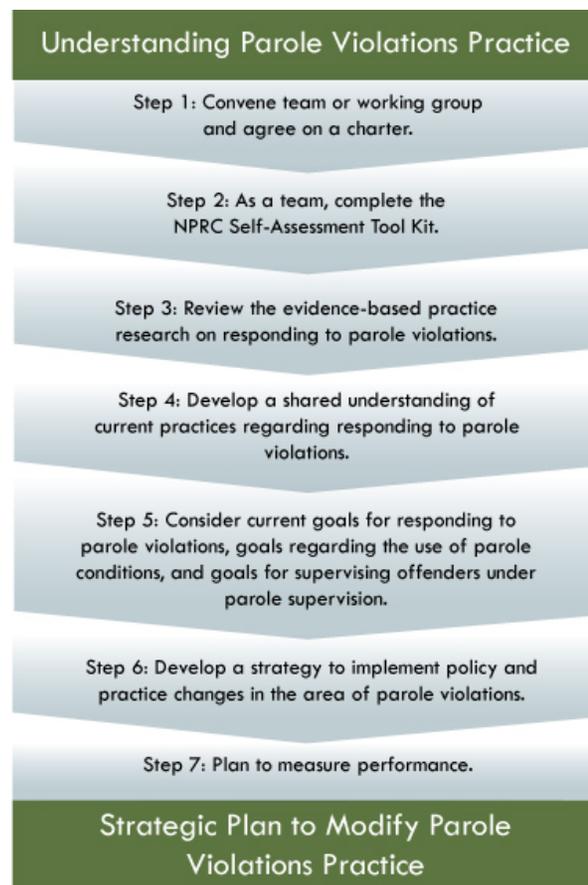
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Moving Toward Implementing Practice Improvements and Performance Measurement

If a Board decides to adopt specific policies or practices to improve its parole violation system or parole violation decision making, the following seven step process is recommended as a way of moving forward. Undertaking this process as a team (parole Board members, hearing officers and if appropriate, supervision staff) will facilitate the development of a shared understanding of the current violations data and practices, provide an opportunity to revisit shared goals and values, and build a commitment to implementing agreed-upon changes.

The remainder of this section moves through these steps to assist parole Boards to explore the current research, review existing policy/practice, assess where opportunities for change exist, and plan for desired change. Regardless of whether the parole Board engages in this process as a full body, sub-committee, or working group, it will be important to move through this process as a team. Team-based approaches provide a strong foundation for developing a shared understanding of current practice, and considering what changes might strengthen that practice.

The "roadmap" below illustrates the steps recommended and provides a way to navigate each step:



< [Understanding the Philosophy and Evidence about Responding Most Effectively to Violations](#)

[Step 1: Convene Board or working group and agree on a charter.](#) >

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Step 1: Convene Board or working group and agree on a charter.

A first step in the process is for the parole Board to agree upon who will be involved in the work of examining current parole violation policies and practices, identifying specific goals and objectives in this area, reviewing relevant research, and identifying ways in which the Board can strengthen its practices. The group should development a clear statement of the team's purpose, anticipated activities, and expected outcomes and products. If the group is expected to produce recommendations, it should be clear who will be receiving the recommendations. Ground rules should be established to assist the group with completing its work. This may include language regarding how often the team will meet, how its progress will be documented, and what the timeline for completion is expected to be. Roles on the team should also be specified—including a chair, a record keeper, and any subcommittees. It is advisable that a facilitator, an individual other than the chair, be charged with moving the team through its agendas during working sessions. The facilitator can be an employee of the parole Board, but should have sufficient stature and/or rank to be able to effectively manage the process. A facilitator is often someone with specific skills who is brought in from outside the organization.

Community supervision personnel, regardless of where these individuals may be organizationally located, should participate in the review of current parole violation practices, consideration of the parole violation structure, and methods that can be utilized to achieve desired outcomes.

< [Moving Toward Implementing Practice Improvements and Performance Measurement](#)

[Step 2: As a team, complete the NPRC Self-Assessment Tool Kit.](#) >

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Step 2: As a team, complete the NPRC Self-Assessment Tool Kit.

Parole Boards reviewing their parole violation practices may have already undertaken the activities advised in the National Parole Resource Center's [Paroling Authority Self-Assessment Toolkit](#). If not, they are encouraged to avail themselves of this opportunity to give all Board members a common frame of reference, introduce the NPRC's "Practice Targets," and examine how practices can be described in relation to those targets. An important part of developing an effective change strategy is to clearly understand all aspects of current practice. The *Toolkit* provides a framework for a Board to develop such a shared understanding from a "big picture" point of view.

< [Step 1: Convene Board or working group and agree on a charter.](#)

[Step 3: Review the evidence-based practice research on condition setting.](#) >

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Step 3: Review the evidence-based practice research on parole supervision practices and parole violation decision making.

Evidence-based practice research has helped jurisdictions to appreciate the value of the following concepts:

- All violations should be responded to in some way (See: Grasmack & Bryjak, 1980; Nichols & Ross, 1990; Paternoster, 1989).
- All responses to violations should be swift and certain. (See: Grasmack and Bryjak 1980; Nichols and Ross 1990; Paternoster 1989; Paternoster et al. 1997; Rhine 1993; Von Hirsch 1993; Burdon et al., 2001; Dayan & Abbot, 2001; Griffith et al., 2000; Higgins & Silverman, 1999; Marlowe & Kirby, 1999; Murphy, Vuchinich, & Simpson, 2001).
- The level of risk and severity of the behavior should be considered when determining an appropriate response to violation behavior (see, e.g., Carter, 2001).
- A response to an offender's behavior that best addresses the criminogenic needs and issues presented by the offender should be considered (See: French and Gendreau, 2003, Andrews, 2007; Andrews et al., 1990).
- To the extent possible, responses to offenders' behaviors should assist them in identifying their strengths and goals through the use of Motivational Interviewing (See: Walter, Clark, Gingerich, and Meltzer 2007).
- Positive offenders' behaviors should be consistently reinforced through the use of verbal affirmations, positive reinforcements, rewards and incentives four times more than sanctions for violations (See: Andrews & Bonta, 1998; Bandura, 1977; Cullen & Gendreau, 2000; Drake & Barnoski, 2008; Latessa, Cullen, & Gendreau, 2002; Gendreau & Goggin, 1996; Higgins, & Silverman, 1999; National Research Council, 2007; Petersilia, 2007; Petersilia, 2004; Taxman, Soule, & Gelb, 1999; Wodahl et al., 2011).
- A response that is minimally necessary to sanction the violation and assist in moving the offender towards positive change should be considered (See: for a discussion of proportionality, Von Hirsch, 1993).
- Risk to the community and/or victim should be considered as an overriding issue when considering a response to behavior (see, e.g., Andrews and Bonta, 2008; Carter, 2001).
- Technical violations may be handled more efficiently administratively rather than in the courts or before the Board (see, e.g., Carter, 2001).

[< Step 2: As a team, complete the NPRC Self-Assessment Tool Kit.](#)

[Step 4: Develop a shared understanding of your Board's current condition setting practice. >](#)

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Step 4: Develop a shared understanding of current practices regarding the imposition of parole conditions, approaches to parole supervision, and responding to parole violations.

Once a parole Board has used the Toolkit to develop a "big picture" understanding of their practice and fully familiarized themselves with the key findings from the research, they are then in a better position to delve more deeply into specific issues—such as exploring alternative responses that may be utilized in responding to parole violations. ([Click here](#) for a sample working session agenda that can be used for Steps 3-5 of this guide. The agenda is an example of a one day session but can easily be divided into multiple workgroup sessions.)

By following the steps outlined here, a Board can review its current parole violation practices, and create an overview of its strengths and weaknesses. The goal of doing so is to generate a clear understanding of what constitutes current policy and practice in this area, what forms the basis for that policy and practice (e.g., statute, administrative regulation, case law or past practice), and what is known about both process and outcomes (e.g., the steps followed in the process, lengths of time associated with each step, the number of violations, whether they involve technical violations or new crimes, sanctions or responses used, and the number of revocations). This review and discussion will begin to generate a system-wide understanding of how parole violations are currently being managed, and the implications of current approaches.

- What data exists (or could be gathered) to generally understand the number of offenders under supervision, the number of violations that occur, and the number of offenders who have their parole case revoked? Is there information that exists or could be developed to help understand parole violation trends?
- What is the consensus about whether parole conditions are being effectively and reasonably imposed in individual cases?
- What information exists that might help demonstrate which conditions are most often involved in violation cases— and which violations most often result in revocation?
- What is the consensus about the overall supervision approach that is being used by the parole supervision entity? Are incentives and rewards used to encourage appropriate or positive offender conduct?
- Are front-line supervision staff, hearing officers, supervisors, or others, empowered to implement solutions and take action to resolve violations as an alternative to referring violations to the Board? Under what circumstances are these staff empowered to act and what options do they have?
- Is objective risk/need information available for use by field staff, and is this information used in making parole violation decisions by staff and the Board?
- Have any specialized tools being used to help guide violation decision making? Were these tools developed locally? Are they grounded in research on what works and other research (risk factors, etc.)?

- What type of training do Board members and staff receive about the philosophical and practical aspects of responding effectively to parole violations?
- Is it clear who can serve as a resource to respond to questions and concerns the Board may have regarding parole violation data or practice?
- Has available data on recidivism by risk and need level been compiled and reviewed? This should include information on both new crime and technical violation recidivism.
- Questions concerning parole supervision efforts should involve staff and managers from the parole supervision agency.

< [Step 3: Review the evidence-based practice research on condition setting.](#)

[Step 5: Consider your Board's goals for condition setting and develop a shared statement for your purpose; convene working sessions to discuss: number of conditions, standard and special conditions, targeting for maximum risk reduction, and conditions for special populations of offenders.](#) >

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Step 5: Consider goals and objectives for how your Board responds to parole violations.

After having engaged in the exercise of reviewing their own practices, parole Boards should develop a shared vision of their goals and purposes in the parole violation area. With these goals in mind and having assembled good, descriptive information about current practice and evidence-based research, parole Boards can determine whether changes are necessary in order to improve practices regarding the imposition of conditions, the supervision of parolees, responses to parole violations, and parole violation decision making. If changes are required, then decisions will need to be made to address the following questions:

- How can conditions be more appropriately utilized to accomplish the Board's objectives?
- If certain evidence-based parole supervision approaches are not being used by the field supervision agency, how can the Board help stimulate an interest in making appropriate changes in this area (e.g., effectively using risk/needs information in creating case plans, using incentives and rewards to motivate offenders, etc.)?
- If there is a desire to expand the authority of staff to respond to violations, or a desire to increase the options that can be used by staff when violations occur, what issues or obstacles may need to be overcome so that more immediate responses can be imposed (legislative, judicial rulings, administrative procedures, or other issues)?
- If the Board wishes to develop and utilize a violation decision making tool, what are the most important factors (e.g., risk) that should be incorporated into this tool?
- How can the Board collaborate – both internally and with the parole supervision authority – to help bring about sustained and desired changes?

[< Step 4: Develop a shared understanding of your Board's current condition setting practice.](#)

[Step 6: Develop a strategy to implement changes to condition setting policy and practice. >](#)

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Step 6: Develop a strategy to implement policy and practice changes in how your Board responds to parole violations.

As part of the sessions undertaken in Step 5, or in a separate working session, develop a list of changes that the Board (or the group empowered by the Board to explore this area), feels should be made in order to improve parole violation practices. These changes may involve:

- Modifications to policies and procedures that empower staff to respond in new ways to parole violations or encourage the use of evidence based supervision strategies;
- Development of alternative violation options;
- Creation of a parole violation decision making tool;
- The identification of required legislative changes or changes to administrative rules; and
- The establishment of collaborative discussions with the parole supervision entity.

After the parole Board identifies desired changes to policy and practice—and has articulated the potential challenges in implementation these strategies—it is important to identify strategies that the Board will pursue in securing buy-in from key stakeholders and the mechanism(s) that will be used to move forward (e.g., committees, staff support, training, routine meetings, etc.) with this work.

Successful implementation of revised policy and practice requires the development of an "action plan". [Click here](#) for a sample of what an action plan might look like.

[< Step 5: Consider your Board's goals for condition setting and develop a shared statement for your purpose; convene working sessions to discuss: number of conditions, standard and special conditions, targeting for maximum risk reduction, and conditions for special populations of offenders.](#)

[Step 7: Develop a plan to measure performance. >](#)

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Step 7: Plan to Measure Performance

A performance measurement plan involves developing the capacity to measure progress toward desired outcomes, continually tracking progress, and using information for improvement. Management of change, whether it is about parole violations, or any other aspect of the Board's work, requires feedback loops to determine whether the change has actually been implemented. A feedback loop is a mechanism to monitor outcomes and "feedback" that information to decision-makers through regular reports. Such data and information is essential to determining whether the change is having the desired outcomes.

Feedback loops function through regular review of offender files and staff actions. Key questions to monitor by feedback loops can include:

- Are field staff properly prepared to effectively use new violation options?
- Is the violations decision making tool being appropriately used (consistent with policies, risk levels, types of violations, etc.) by field staff and the Board?
- In what types of cases are alternative sanctions being used? Are these uses of alternative sanctions consistent with original expectations?
- Is there any change in the type of violation case that comes before the Board?
- Is there a change in the number of paroles revoked based on the commission of new crimes?
- Is there any change in the number or percentage of parolees being revoked for technical violations?

Routine collection of parole violation and revocation information is essential for determining the impact of parole violation changes on the overall parole system. One strategy to ensure that this monitoring occurs is to form a performance management team or subcommittee to review policies and practices and report back on performance and outcomes. The team would be responsible for identifying key measures and processes for collection them, reviewing program elements and making recommendations for the implementation, monitoring, re-evaluating, and reporting of performance activities. Data helpful to determining whether the changes experienced are desired changes include rates of technical violations and return to prison for new criminal offenses. A "checklist" for measuring progress toward completing the action plan is critical. Performance measures must be clear and specific to monitoring changes in responses to parole violations. [Click here](#) for a draft performance management checklist.

< [Step 6: Develop a strategy to implement changes to condition setting policy and practice.](#)

[Sample Documents](#) >

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Sample Documents

Below is a list of all of the sample documents that teams can use in their work to advance risk and needs assessment practice in their jurisdictions. Click on the respective links below to access each of these documents, which can be adapted to meet the needs of specific Boards.

[Sample Agenda](#)

[Sample Action Plan](#)

[Sample Charter](#)

[Sample Performance Measurement Plan](#)

< [Step 7: Develop a plan to measure performance.](#)

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Agenda for State X's Working Group Meeting on Responding to Violations

Participants

Participants for this session should include parole Board members, representatives from executive parole staff, a sample of supervision agency leadership and field staff, and parole staff who will be responsible for collecting performance measurement or other quantitative information.

Goals of This Session

The Board and other participants will develop a proposed list of changes that the Board, as a whole, feels should be made to the practice of responding to parole violations.

Proposed Agenda

8:30 a.m. Call to Order, Introductions of all Key Staff

8:45 a.m. Evaluating our Current Approach to Responding to Violations

- Consider the purpose, value, and objectives of your current approach to violations. Is there an established decisionmaking process in place? How does this process work? Are practices consistent for similarly situated offenders?
- Are most violations technical in nature? Or are a significant proportion related to new crimes?
- Are sanctions imposed for violations tied to offenders' risk and criminogenic needs?
- Are there adequate programs/non incarcerative sanctions available to respond to less serious violations appropriately? Where do gaps in the sanctions/responses exist?

10:00 a.m. Break

10:15 a.m. Defining the Challenges Associated with Our Current Practice

What impact does our current approach have...

- On offenders? Are they clear that violations will be responded to, and do they understand the range of possible sanctions? Do they understand that there is a consistent process, and what that process is?
- On supervision staff and their ability to interact with clients in a way that promotes positive behavior change and matches offenders with sanctions that are designed to reduce recidivism?

- On limited agency resources? Are offenders being sanctioned to higher intensity programming or returned to custody when less stringent alternatives may be used without compromising public safety?

11:30 a.m. Lunch

12:30 p.m. Reviewing the Science: What do We Know About Evidence-Based Practices in Responding to Violations?

- Is there agreement that each violation warrants a response?
- Are all members in agreement about the principles of proportionality, swiftness, consistency, and celerity?
- What does the evidence tell us about using community-based sanctions whenever it is possible and does not pose a significant threat to public safety?
- How do structured instruments help jurisdictions to achieve consistency in violations practice?

1:30 p.m. Break

1:45 p.m. Considering a Structured Response (or Enhancing Current Response) to Violations

- Is there a structured violations decisionmaking process in place?
- Is there a response to every violation? Is there a comprehensive range of sanctions that have been identified?
- If a new tool or process will be developed, what are the implications for staff training and time?
- What buy in (from staff, legislature, etc.) would need to be acquired in support of this effort? What outreach would the team need to do in order to educate others about the evidence-based practice in this area?

3:45 p.m. Consider Topics for Next Meeting

- Finalizing list of sanctions/responses to violations behavior
- Establishing subcommittee to work on developing a violations decisionmaking process (if none exists) and/or expanding range of response options
- Workplanning on encouraging staff buy in and how to secure any needed statutory changes
- Establishing performance measurement subcommittee

4:30 p.m. Adjourn

Action Plan for Implementing Changes in Responding to Violations of Parole

First, clearly identify specific change targets that were agreed upon at the conclusion of the Board’s discussions on all earlier issues related to more effectively responding to violations. Then for each issue, consider:

- What needs to be done to start implementing these changes?
- Is the issue at hand a long term issue or a short term issue? A short term issue is something that can be handled without additional resources or legislation, and that can be accomplished within six months. A long term issue requires more investment of resources, statutory changes or work over a longer period of time.

Short Term Issues

Short Term Issue (Example)	Indicate three things that need to occur in the next 30 days	Individual(s) Responsible	Due Date
Move toward development of a violations decisionmaking tool, if one does not yet exist (or needs to be updated.)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Name members to a subcommittee. 2. Conduct a literature review that outlines the evidence that supports the development of such a process. 3. Work toward establishing the basic components that would comprise the decisionmaking process/tool (e.g., list of violations behavior, range of possible sanctions/incentives.) 	Mary Smith (in conjunction with parole managers in pilot sites)	December 1, 2014

	<p>and promote more successful outcomes with offenders.</p> <p>3. Develop policy that supports using less intensive interventions as often as is possible in light of public safety considerations.</p> <p>4. Develop a plan to measure the impact of changes that will be made.</p>	<p>Full Board, led by Chair</p> <p>Subcommittee, led by Chair or another Board member</p>	<p>come to agreement?</p> <p>3. As a group, develop language that supports the Board's philosophy in this area.</p> <p>4. As a group, consider the development of a plan that will track changes in practice, increased use of non-incarcerative sanctions, any corresponding increases/decreases to recidivism or technical violation rates.</p>	<p>July 1, 2015</p> <p>October 1, 2015</p>
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Example of a Charter for a Committee Considering Changes in Responding to Violations

Team Purpose

The mission of our state's committee is to consider the current approach to responding to violations of parole, review the current evidence and literature about "what works" in this area, to decide whether and how to make changes to violations practice, and to pilot and implement these changes in practice within an eighteen month period. Our committee clearly outlined the desired outcomes for this effort, including:

Team Membership

- Establishing a committee with members possessing knowledge and expertise about parole conditions and responding to violations, evidence-based correctional practice, and risk reduction; and
- Establishing a subcommittee of this group that would be tasked specifically with addressing performance measurement issues.

Activities/Tasks

- Conducting a thorough review of the literature on emerging evidence-based practice in best practices in this area, including the need to respond to violations in ways that protect the community, reduce risk, and use limited correctional resources most judiciously; and
- Convening a series of meetings to review and discuss this information and to consider its potential implications for responding to parole violations in our jurisdiction.

Expected Outcomes

- Within six months of the committee's inception, make recommendations about changes to current violations practice for the consideration of the entire Board;
- Within nine months of the committee's inception, draft policy and procedures to support the proposed changes to responding to violations;
- Within nine months of the committee's inception, the performance measurement subcommittee will develop a proposed performance measurement plan to track changes and key outcomes (e.g., violations rates and outcomes; returns to custody; increase in programming of non-incarcerative sanctions; etc.);
- Within one year of the committee's inception, implement a 90-day "pilot" trial of the new responses to violation system that will allow the team to gauge the effectiveness of the new approach and potential refinements that may be needed; and
- Within eighteen months of the committee's inception, finalize and implement recommended policy and practice and performance measurement changes with respect to responding to violations.

Violations Performance Measures Checklist

A performance measurement workgroup should be formed to address potential changes in how a jurisdiction responds to violations of supervision. There are a number of ways in which a carefully constructed performance measurement system will prove useful. Performance information provides for:

- An objective way to account for activities and accomplishments over time;
- A method to quantify the cost/benefit of investments and allocate additional resources (or reallocate resources) as may be appropriate;
- An opportunity to identify and intervene with implementation problems (or potential problems) that can impede goal achievement if not addressed in a timely fashion; and
- Objective and specific data that can be used to report performance to staff as a means to further engage and motivate, and external stakeholders (e.g., funders, other vested parties) as a means to demonstrate the benefit of investments.

Information about the following indicators should be collected in order to provide quantitative support and to track the impact of changes that are made with respect to responding to violations. Boards should document:

- The potential range of violation behavior;
- Available options used to respond to violations; and
- Any changes that are made to the range of sanctions available to be imposed.

After any changes responding to violations are implemented, collect information about offenders (categorized by assessed risk level and type of crime) that includes but is not limited to:

- Number/percent of offenders who violate terms and conditions of supervision (comparison of number of revocations/violations with the same period last year/quarter).
- Number of revocations/violations in the current month/year/quarter (comparison of number of revocations/violations with the same period last year/quarter).
- Percentage of cases successfully completing parole in the current month/year/quarter (comparison of successful completions with the previous year/quarter).
- Number of parole violators violated for new offenses and/or technical violations where community-based sanctions were imposed.
- Number of parole violators returned to prison for new offenses and/or technical violations.
- Percentage of parolees revoked.

Performance Management is a system of:

- ✓ Regularly measuring the results (outcomes) of initiatives,
- ✓ Using this information to increase efficiency and effectiveness in approaches or service delivery, and
- ✓ Reporting important indicators of program operations and results.

- Number of new offenses over time by offenders on parole.
- Number/percent of offenders who are violation free after one year on supervision.

Information about changes in supervision staff practice (e.g., time spent in face to face interactions with offenders vs. solely monitoring compliance) should also be collected in some way in order to assess the impact that such a fundamental shift may have on promoting positive changes in offender behavior.

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Links

The following organizations, websites and publications are helpful for obtaining specific guidance on parole-related issues.

The [Center for Effective Public Policy \(CEPP\)](#) manages the [National Parole Resource Center](#), which has developed, among other resources, a series of five papers on parole entitled Parole Essentials: Practical Guides for Parole Leaders that address the specific challenges of paroling authorities. Each paper can be accessed below:

- [Core Competencies: A Resource for Parole Board Chairs, Members, and Executive Staff](#)
- [Evidence-Based Policy, Practice, and Decisionmaking: Implications for Paroling Authorities](#)
- [Paroling Authorities' Strategic Planning and Management for Results](#)
- [Special Challenges Facing Parole](#)
- [The Future of Parole as a Key Partner in Assuring Public Safety](#)

The [National Institute of Corrections \(NIC\)](#) is an agency within the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons. NIC also provides leadership to influence correctional policies, practices, and operations nationwide in areas of emerging interest and concern to correctional executives and practitioners as well as public policymakers. This is accomplished through the provision training, technical assistance, and policy/program development assistance to federal, state, and local corrections agencies. A key resource, the Robert J. Kutak Memorial Library, houses a specialized collection of corrections-related materials. The focus of the collection is on unpublished, operationally-oriented resources developed by correctional agencies for use by practitioners in the field.

The [Association of Paroling Authorities International \(APAI\)](#) originated in the early 1970s at the urging of international parole colleagues with a strong interest in best practices and current issues surrounding conditional release, reentry into the community and public safety. Despite different parole legislation, policies and regulations, members – individuals and organizations from 38 countries – share the fundamental value in the belief of a person's ability to change and the conviction that gradual, supervised reintegration into our communities is an effective protection of public safety.

The [Association of State Correctional Administrators \(ASCA\)](#) has developed standardized definitions of key measures and uniform performance reporting implemented by approximately 26 states.

The [Pew Center on the States' Public Safety Performance Project](#), launched in 2006 as a project of the Pew Center on the States with a goals towards helping states advance fiscally sound, data-driven policies and practices in sentencing and corrections that protect public safety, hold offenders accountable, and control corrections costs. The publication referenced in this guide, "Putting Public Safety First: 13 Strategies for Successful Supervision and Reentry," resulted

from two meetings with national experts on the topic of parole supervision hosted by Urban Institute in 2007. An excerpt from the full document is available [here](#).

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Acknowledgments

This Action Guide was developed by Richard P. Stroker, Center for Effective Public Policy and Leilah Gilligan, Project Manager, National Parole Resource Center. Peggy Burke, Project Director, National Parole Resource Center provided editorial support and made significant contributions to this resource. The NPRC thanks the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance for its ongoing support of the NPRC.

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