

The Framework of an Effective Offender Reentry Strategy

Reentry in the State of Connecticut:
Partners in Progress
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THE FRAMEWORK



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Leadership and Organizational Change



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Initial Thought

- We all have the capacity and ability to make meaningful and lasting changes.

“If we all did the things that we were capable of doing we would literally astound ourselves.”

-Thomas Edison

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1. Knowing Your Direction

- In undertaking any work, it certainly helps to have a clear idea of where we want to end up. As Alice learned in Wonderland, “If you don’t know where you’re going, then any road will do.”
- Without an appreciation of your intended destination, it’s hard to know whether or not your work is helping you to achieve your goals – as even well intended work activities can become fragmented or disconnected.
“If you chase two rabbits, both will escape.” A.V.C.

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What is the Emerging “Vision” Regarding Offender Reentry?

- There is a growing consensus amongst state entities involved with SVORI, TPC, NGA and other reentry initiatives that their vision is to collaboratively develop strategies that will promote a greater likelihood of offender success after release to the community.
- Having a greater percentage of offenders successfully reintegrate into communities means a reduction of recidivism and enhanced public safety (fewer crimes, fewer victims).

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Offender Success and Public Safety

- In creating a vision in which promoting the success of adult and juvenile offenders is a key to promoting public safety, jurisdictions are considering:
 - Recent research in the areas of offender risk, needs, and responsivity
 - The emergence of evidence based practice information
 - The belief that agencies and entities can work together in order to create a more seamless and effective overall system for managing offenders
 - An appreciation of the results that our current practices have on the allocation of existing resources

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Examples of Vision Statements

- GA: “Promoting public safety through collaborative partnerships which reflect a seamless system that ensures all returning offenders are law-abiding, productive community citizens.”
- MI: “Reduce crime by implementing a seamless plan of services and supervision developed with each offender, delivered through state and local collaboration, from the time of their entry into prison through their transition, reintegration and aftercare in the community.”

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How Does This Relate to Your Vision?

- In order for these reentry efforts to be successful, the vision and beliefs of the leaders of institutional and community supervision entities, state and local providers of various types of services or assistance, and community groups or other interested parties will be critical.

“To the person who does not know where he wants to go there is no favorable wind.”

Seneca, Roman Philosopher

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North Carolina

- “We have to engage the offender in the change process and address the criminogenic needs of offenders that have been proven by research to impact recidivism. If we are successful in affecting a positive change in the offender’s criminal behavior, recidivism can be reduced - thus making our communities safer.”

Division of Community Corrections, 2005

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A Look Backward

- Over the past 20 years, our field has seen an enormous growth in our offender populations, often without a corresponding increase in our resources.
- For a variety of reasons, we have seen the emergence of many “get tough” approaches regarding the management of offenders. These have included “3 strikes” laws, the decline of discretionary release options, and the emergence of surveillance and control activities or programs.

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Looking Forward

- The desire to increase public safety by focusing on activities that can increase the likelihood of offender success offers a different way of achieving your public safety objectives.
- Even though the end result you seek may be the same, the actions you take, methods you use and systems that you design may be quite different than those currently in use. To make changes in your system, leadership will be required.

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2. The Critical Role of Leadership

- Leadership is, at least in part, the ability to help create meaningful change by:
 - **Setting the context:** Start with the end in mind – communicate where you want the organization to go;
 - **Aligning work to fit the vision:** Help people do the critical things that must be done in order for the organization to move in your intended direction – such as prioritizing work activities;
 - **Encouraging and rewarding the outcomes that you seek:** Consider the impacts that your hiring, promotional, training, and quality assurance efforts have on staff.

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What is Required to Move Forward?

- Consistently indicating the values and objectives that determine the organization's direction.
- Logically explaining the reasons for changes.
- Involving people in discussions about the need for change and encouraging individuals to become involved in developing solutions.
- Helping individuals to develop the competencies they need to be successful, and recognizing and rewarding good work.

“There is nothing more demoralizing than a leader who can't clearly articulate why we are doing what we're doing.”

- James Kouzes and Barry Posner

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Your Organization's Actions and Activities Reveal its Beliefs

- In light of your vision concerning offender transition and reentry, consider the following:
 - What is valued in employees? Who is hired/promoted/recognized?
 - How do staff spend their time? How is staff time prioritized?
 - What are staff trained to do?
 - What do your policies express regarding the management or supervision of offenders?

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Appreciating the Importance of Organizational Culture

- Work activities can be identified and linked together to help achieve particular outcomes that are consistent with your vision.
- But attitudes, beliefs, methods, and choices made by individual staff, or by groups of staff, create the climate in which this work gets carried out. This climate can support and promote changes – or prevent or delay them.
- Leadership is required to both determine direction, and influence the actions and attitudes of those individuals who help organizations move in a particular direction.

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What is Organizational Culture?

- Organizational culture refers to the accepted norms, practices, values, customs, traditions, or behavior patterns of employees.
- Organizational management author Edgar H. Schein (1992) has written that an organization or office culture is developed over time in response to work situations, external pressures or forces, and the need to solve particular problems.

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3. The External Environment

- In moving forward with your intended changes, it is also important to consider the perspective of individuals and groups that are not part of your organization.
- Key government officials, personnel from other state agencies, victims, community providers, and many others may have specific interests or concerns that may need to be considered and incorporated into your final products.

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4. What Types of Changes Might Occur?

- Rather than simply responding to offender failure, we now see some jurisdictions taking a more active role in trying to systematically promote more success (and thereby prevent failures) by offenders.
- There is no doubt that the best possible protection of the public occurs when no crime is committed. Prevention, rather than responding to failure, can become the focus for our work.

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How a Focus on Prevention Can Alter Our Approach to Work

- Identifying offender success and prevention as our desired outcomes may cause us to rethink how certain aspects of our work are approached. For instance:
 - Specific risk, needs, and transition issues must be appropriately identified and attended to by institutional staff long before the offender's release.
 - Staff need to be armed with all of the pertinent information necessary to effectively manage or supervise the offender.
 - Institutional and community corrections staff, along with community providers and others, will have to work in harmony to develop and carry out appropriate supervision plans.
 - Staff may have to change the nature or substance of their interactions with offenders.

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“You might be on the right track,
but you’ll still get run over if
you just sit there.”

-Will Rogers

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Rational Planning Process



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Opening Thought

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree,
and I will spend the first four hours
sharpening the axe.”

- *Abraham Lincoln*

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Developing a Rational Approach to Making Organizational Changes

- As we contemplate moving forward in this area, we need to have a system or method that we can employ to rationally consider where we are, what we have, and how this compares to where we want to be.
- The objective identification of issues, gaps, problems, and opportunities will give us the ability to constructively move our organizations in the desired directions.

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Why a Rational Planning Process?

- Even with the best of intentions, it is common for organizations to make changes prematurely in an attempt to achieve a specific goal or outcome:
 - In a reactionary manner, in response to a critical incident
 - Due to external pressures
 - Because of a new and promising idea or popular trend
 - Based on a suspicion, belief, or assumption that a problem, need, or gap exists
- These attempts to promote system change may not produce the desired results.

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Why a Rational Planning Process? (cont.)

- Reasonable, effective, and lasting change is more likely to occur when we understand and agree upon:
 - Precisely what we want to achieve or accomplish
 - where we ultimately want to be (vision)
 - Where we are currently in relation to that vision
 - Existing strengths of the system upon which we can build
 - Needs or barriers in policies, procedures, or resources that hinder our ability to advance
 - The most critical priorities
 - The specific strategies that will be most effective for *our* agency to explore

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A Structure for Pursuing Change

In order to be successful at examining practices and identifying issues, an appropriate structure must be in place to help make sense of the work to be done.

A simple, unified, coordinated structure should be created to help the organization move forward.

“Great leaders are great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, debate and doubt to offer solutions that everyone can understand.”

- Colin Powell

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Assessing the Strengths and Needs Within Your Agency

- Consider the following:
 - The offender population within your agency and/or jurisdiction
 - The activities and services available – both within the agency and within the jurisdiction – to manage this population
 - The policies and procedures within your organization that describe how offender management currently occurs
 - The empirically-based research on offender management practices, as well as the lessons emerging from national experience on innovative approaches to offender management and reentry

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Facilitating Lasting and Impactful Change

- In light of this information:
 - Critically assess the most significant needs – those that, if addressed, are likely to result in the greatest impact
 - Identify detailed and specific strategies to address the prioritized needs
 - Oversee the careful implementation of these strategies

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Monitor Results and Make Necessary Changes to Practice

- Monitor the results to determine the extent to which the desired change – and movement toward your vision – is occurring
- Use the results to inform continued efforts or potential changes to your strategies in order to ensure successful outcomes

“However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results.”

- Winston Churchill

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Move Forward

- Effective planning is an essential ingredient of successful offender reentry work. But planning, alone, will not produce results.
- Never lose sight of your objectives and never lose your initiative.

“A good plan implemented today is better than a great plan implemented tomorrow.”

- Gen. George S. Patton

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Collaboration



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Something to Consider

- “You could have the best bunch of individual players in the world, but if they don’t play like a team, they won’t be worth a dime.”

- *Babe Ruth*

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Reentry Barriers are Multifaceted

- Limited housing
- Unemployment
- Educational needs
- Mental health difficulties
- Healthcare needs
- Financial instability
- Family concerns
- Public sentiment

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Collaborative Partnerships are Essential

- The number and nature of reentry barriers extend far beyond the boundaries of the criminal and juvenile justice systems.
- Successful reentry cannot be achieved through the efforts of any single agency.
- Multi-agency, multi-disciplinary collaboration is vital to overcome these barriers.
- A combination of traditional and non-traditional partnerships is required.

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Two Levels of Multi-Agency Collaboration

- State, regional, or local policy teams
 - Individuals that have decisionmaking or policymaking authority
- Case management teams
 - Individuals providing direct services to offenders and their families

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Who Should Be Involved?

- Individuals, agencies, and organizations that:
 - Have a vested interest in community safety
 - Are directly or indirectly responsible for offender management
 - Work closely with – or advocate for – victims
 - Can provide mentoring or positive social supports
 - Offer educational and vocational services
 - Can promote access to appropriate and affordable housing
 - Deliver healthcare services
 - Provide mental health services
 - Have the ability to facilitate access to employment
 - Can provide support and assistance to children and families of formerly incarcerated individuals

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Examples of Key Stakeholders

- Criminal courts
- Adult corrections agencies
- Community supervision agencies
- Paroling authorities
- Mental health agencies
- Public health departments and other healthcare agencies
- Veteran's affairs officials
- Housing authorities
- Employment agencies
- Social services agencies
- Faith-based partners

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A Shared Vision

- These diverse agencies and organizations often have individual visions and missions that may not complement or support one another
 - Competing policies and practices may actually become barriers to successful reentry
- To ensure successful reentry, it is possible – *and essential* – to create a shared vision across agencies
- Through a shared vision, key stakeholders are able to find common ground that can serve as a catalyst for promoting offender success and ensuring public safety
 - Each stakeholder begins to recognize their unique role
 - The cumulative energy and effort becomes powerful

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Multi-agency partnerships can ensure that the necessary supports, services, and offender-management practices are provided in a manner that promote offender success and community safety.

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Effective Offender Management



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One More Thought

- “The only true measure of success is the ratio between what we might have done and what we might have been on the one hand, and the thing we have made and the things we have made of ourselves on the other.”

- H.G. Wells

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Evidence-Based vs. Promising Practices

- There is empirical support for several of the offender management practices (i.e., “evidence-based approaches”)
 - Researchers have confirmed specific and defined outcomes (e.g., reductions in recidivism, increased employment rates, behavioral improvements)
- Other elements have not been empirically tested, but there is general agreement among experienced professionals that these offender management practices are important and beneficial (i.e., “promising practices” or “emerging practices”)

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Key Offender Management Practices

- Early and ongoing assessment to identify risk and criminogenic needs, both within the institutional/residential setting and the community
- Evidence based interventions within the institutional/residential setting
- Proactive transition and release planning
- Informed release decision making

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Key Offender Management Practices

- Success-oriented supervision approaches that reinforce desired behaviors and include graduated responses to violations
- Evidence-based interventions in the community
- Services and supports in the community
- Planning for ultimate release from the authority of the correctional, juvenile justice, or supervision agency
- Monitoring and evaluation of policies and practices

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Making Progress

- The numerous obstacles and issues that must be overcome in order to promote more offender success can seem daunting. Perhaps it helps us to think not in terms of final outcomes, but in terms of progress towards our goals.

“Many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.”

- Thomas Edison

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Conclusions

- We must identify how we want to do business and what we want to accomplish. Do we want our work to be driven by a desire to promote offender success or by expectations for offender failure?
- We must recognize that working in isolation will not allow us to effectuate successful reentry outcomes. As such, we must make a commitment to work closely with other key agencies, organizations, and individuals.
- We must challenge ourselves to ensure that our practices are state-of-the-art, empirically supported, and effective. As we identify “what works” (and what isn’t working), we must be willing to adjust our strategies to ensure maximum impact.

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In Other Words

It is best if we just chase one rabbit – let us state our goals and objectives as simply and clearly as possible.

Our efforts will be more productive if we are truly prepared for the work ahead. But always move forward - don’t wait on perfection.

We must strive to work together like a team. It is the best route to our collective success.

Strive to employ the best methods and practices in your work.

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