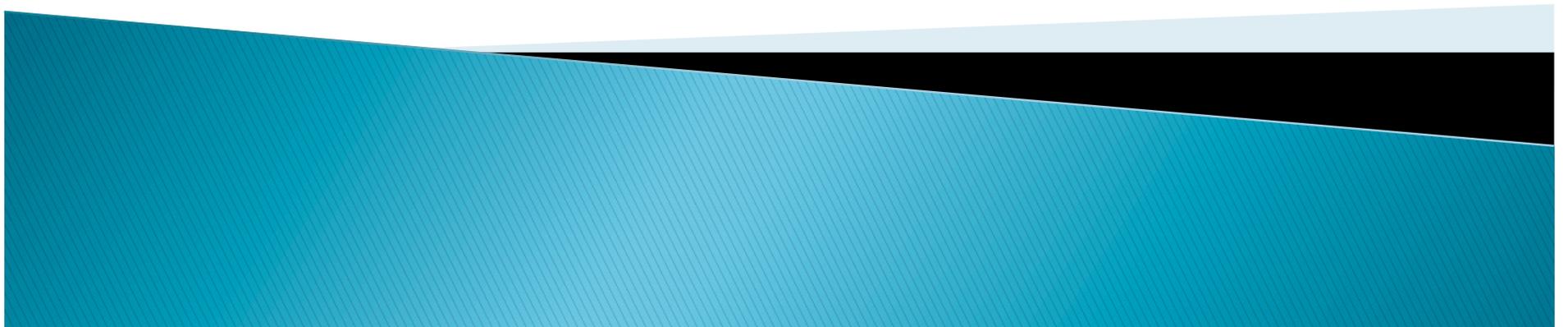


# Engaging Parole Boards in Reentry Planning

Richard P. Stroker  
Center for Effective Public Policy



# Introduction

- ▶ Effective reentry efforts have three stages:
- ▶ An Institutional Phase:
  - Where intake, assessment, and institutional programming occur
- ▶ A Transition Phase
  - Where reentry and intake preparation, release decision making/condition setting, “in-reach,” and reintegration coordination activities occur
- ▶ A Community Reintegration Phase
  - Where community supervision, community treatment, and preparation for release from criminal justice supervision occur.



# Introduction

- ▶ Effective reentry efforts:
  - Start as soon as possible after the inmate's admission to the system;
  - Assess criminogenic needs
  - Develop case plans that follow the offender over time;
  - Provide appropriate treatment and interventions based on criminogenic needs;
  - Share information about the offender across agencies or entities;
  - Coordinate activities, programming, approaches and efforts to maximize overall impact.



# Introduction

- ▶ Effectively doing this work requires the active participation of numerous entities to include:
  - Institutional corrections
  - Parole Boards
  - Parole Supervision
  - Probation Supervision
  - Community Service Providers
  - Community Treatment Providers
  - Community Organizations
  - Families



# The need to involve parole

- ▶ Obviously, any meaningful reentry planning efforts must involve the parole board and the parole supervision organization.
- ▶ Without their participation, you can only work on certain pieces of your reentry system.



# 1. Understanding the work of a parole board

## **Paroling Authorities:**

- ▶ Make judgments about readiness for release and set conditions for over 125,000 offenders
- ▶ Set conditions of release for another 300,000
- ▶ Oversee compliance with conditions of release and make determinations about responses for a population of 650,000
- ▶ Return 300,000 offenders per year (more than one-third of all admissions to prison)

◦ Burke and Tonry, 2006



# Parole boards and reentry

- ▶ Nearly 500,000 releasees from prison receive parole supervision annually.
- ▶ The parole population is now at an all-time high of 825,365 offenders.

▪ Glaze and Bonczar, 2008



# Parole trends

- ▶ Paroling authorities and parole supervision agencies in many states:
  - have become more involved in reentry efforts; and
  - have become more familiar with the principles of evidence-based strategies to achieve greater results in reducing the likelihood of recidivism and enhancing public safety.



# Parole outcomes

- ▶ In some individual state jurisdictions we are beginning to see some significant and promising results involving parole boards to include:
  - ▶ increased collaboration with partners
  - ▶ reduced recidivism
  - ▶ fewer parole returns to prison
  - ▶ reduced prison populations
  - ▶ better parole candidates
- ▶ (for example, KS, MI, MO, NY, GA)



## 2. Parole board operations

- ▶ The size and operation of parole boards varies significantly from state to state.
- ▶ Some states have full time board members, while others have volunteer or part-time members (and some have a combination of the two).
- ▶ Some boards are quite small (3 members) while others can be very large (15 members).
- ▶ Some boards have a large administrative staff while others have only a small support staff.
- ▶ Some boards oversee parole supervision work, while others do not.



# The work of a parole board

- ▶ Whether or not the parole board in your jurisdiction determines the timing of an inmate's release, the board will be making determinations about the conditions of release.
- ▶ Parole boards are often interested in creating conditions that address key criminogenic or crime-producing factors in a case.



# A system partner

- ▶ Parole Boards can play a key role in offender reentry work – and their members are often involved in system efforts to improve offender outcomes.
- ▶ While parole boards are usually “independent” entities, their active participation in the development of meaningful reentry efforts or other promising offender management strategies can often be a key to their success.
- ▶ Participation by parole board members and parole staff in reentry work in WY, GA, MI, MO, PA, NY, NC, OR, MA, ND and other states has strengthened their offender transition efforts.



# Addressing criminogenic needs

- ▶ Many parole boards are familiar with the “evidence based” practice literature, and they are anxious to find programs that can address specific offender needs.
- ▶ In some states, like GA, the parole board (through its staff) actually reviews treatment programs that are available in the community and “certifies” them (or not) as employing evidence based approaches to their work.
- ▶ The approved community program list can then be used by the parole board or field staff when making program placements.



# The location of services

- ▶ In many states, specific types of programs are not uniformly available. While large urban areas may have numerous programs that address particular issues, rural areas may be lacking even basic community treatment programs.
- ▶ Parole boards are often interested in understanding the presence or absence of particular community programs, how parolees might access these services, and the intended audience for available services.



# What parole boards want to know

- ▶ Given their interest in making informed release determinations and imposing appropriate conditions, parole boards will want to know:
  - The offender's risks/needs as identified by institutional assessment instruments
  - The programming that exists/has been provided to address these needs
  - The reentry coordination that might be in place to provide for a continuity of services after release.
  - The reentry release preparation that occurs.



### 3. Getting on the parole board's "wavelength"

- ▶ Here are four tips that might help you to involve parole boards in your reentry planning work:
  - *Help them understand about reentry*
  - *Show them the data*
  - *Help them solve their problems*
  - *Help them see the "big picture"*



## a. Help the Board understand reentry principles

- ▶ Many parole boards around the country are well versed in reentry discussions. Promoting successful offender outcomes is largely seen as an important part of parole work.
- ▶ Help parole board members see the connection between reentry work (assessment, treatment, transition preparation, etc.) and the work of their board.



## b. Show them the data

- ▶ A significant number of individuals who are released from prison will return to prison within three years.
- ▶ Using the above as a definition of recidivism, we see that the “parole success rate” has hovered around 50% for quite some time.
- ▶ What is the parole success rate in your jurisdiction? This information might help a parole board appreciate the importance of working in a systematic way to reduce recidivism.



# Parole case outcomes

- ▶ Parole boards are involved in making release decisions, establishing conditions, and making violation decisions.
- ▶ The parole board needs to have a clear idea about the success (or lack thereof) of individuals who are released on parole.
- ▶ The fact that most parolee failure occurs soon after release is critical to the reentry discussion.
- ▶ Parole outcome data will help the parole board appreciate the importance of effective reentry work.



## c. Help the parole board solve its problems

- ▶ Parole boards often appreciate the problems or needs that particular offenders may face. Housing problems, employment problems, substance abuse problems, etc.
- ▶ The board is often trying to make sense of these needs and address them with conditions.
- ▶ Parole boards realize that there are often problems with the continuity of services, acquiring necessary ID documents, and problems accessing programs.



# Getting the board on board with reentry

- ▶ By demonstrating the actions that you hope to take with your reentry efforts, boards should be able to quickly appreciate how effective reentry work will resolve some of the key issues that they struggle with on a case-by-case basis.
- ▶ This is especially true when you explain that reentry starts at intake. Making sense of institutional programming placements and services will be of keen interest to the board.



## d. Help the parole board see the “big picture” of reentry

- ▶ Parole boards sometimes feel that they work in isolation – separate from the rest of the correctional system.
- ▶ Of course, this isolation can be intentional, to help boards exercise independent judgment in individual cases.
- ▶ But when we consider the overall correctional system, many parole boards see the value of participating in broad discussions about correctional direction, values, and policies.



# Bringing it all together

- ▶ By helping board members see the broad ideas that support effective reentry work, the data that reflects current practices, and opportunities to solve particular issues, parole boards can often appreciate the value of embracing reentry planning efforts.
- ▶ Identify the best type of information to provide or present to your parole board, and get them involved in your reentry work!

