



## **Paroling Authorities as Key Partners in Achieving Governors' Criminal Justice Policy Goals**

---

### *Project Overview*

#### **BACKGROUND**

Of the many responsibilities governors have related to a state's criminal justice system, one significant authority involves the ability to appoint members and chairs of paroling authorities. Over 85 percent of all paroling authority members are appointed by governors. And while boards vary in size, responsibilities, and releasing discretion, collectively they are responsible for parole eligibility decisions that affect 125,000 offenders annually, they set the conditions of release for another 300,000 individuals released on mandatory parole, and make decisions regarding violations for the nearly 800,000 individuals on post-release supervision. Parole board decisions may have significant impacts on state budgets and correctional resources. Coordination between the governor's office, paroling authorities and corrections departments regarding policies and direction may be critically important in fostering long-term and evidence based solutions to pressing criminal justice issues such as reducing recidivism and increasing successful reentry.

#### **PROJECT PURPOSE**

The National Parole Resource Center, in collaboration with the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center), and with support from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), will conduct work under this project with four competitively selected states (these states will be selected in mid-2017). The purpose of this technical assistance is to aid the selected states in developing recommendations to their governors that will strengthen collaboration between the governor's office, the parole board, and the corrections departments, improve understanding regarding direction, key policies and correctional goals, and identify opportunities to improve parole decision-making practices. The project will also convene a "policy summit" that will examine the latest research on best practices for paroling authorities and the critical role they can play in achieving governors' public safety goals.

## **POLICY SUMMIT DESCRIPTION**

Through the policy summit, four selected states will participate in a series of activities designed to share current parole best practices and strengthen partnerships among key criminal justice stakeholders. State teams will attend a two-day meeting (tentatively scheduled for September 2017) to begin developing recommendations for improving current policies and practices, followed by in-state meetings where teams will refine those recommendations and develop strategic plans for implementing them. Areas the summit will focus on include:

- Understanding the role parole systems play in promoting public safety goals and maximizing the use of limited taxpayer resources;
- Identifying specific actions that can best support the paroling authority's work, including:
  - Encouraging collaborative partnerships among the paroling authority, institutional corrections, and post-relief supervision agencies;
  - Adopting evidence-based decision-making tools, including risk and needs assessments, and developing support for identification and development of those tools; and
  - Developing an education strategy to promote greater collaboration among stakeholders and better public understanding of the parole process.

During the summit, teams will have access to a national faculty of experts and their peers through webinars, conference calls, or other virtual convenings. By the end of the project, teams will present strategic plans to their governors for consideration. Potential outputs from the summit include new partnerships and greater collaboration among stakeholders, proposed legislation, executive orders, or public education campaigns. The project will cover travel and lodging expenses for four members of a state's core team to attend the two-day summit meeting.

## **ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE TO PARTICIPATING STATES**

States will receive ongoing technical assistance during the project that will aid them in exploring topics of interest, developing consensus, and producing recommendations to their governors. For more information about this initiative, contact Leilah Gilligan at [lgilligan@cepp.com](mailto:lgilligan@cepp.com).

## **OVERVIEW OF STATE EFFORTS PARTICIPATING IN THE LAST ITERATION OF THIS EFFORT**

Four states participated in this effort between 2015-2016. An overview of their work is provided below.

## **Wyoming**

The Wyoming core team was comprised of the governor's criminal justice policy advisor, the Director and Deputy Director of Corrections, the Executive Director of the Parole Board, and the Chair of the Parole Board. For the first site visit, the core team chose to involve twenty-five leaders and representatives from various state agencies, community providers, and other organizations. The meeting was very successful in promoting a common understanding of certain evidence-based practices and raised awareness about particular issues. Consensus emerged around the need to take action on the following topics:

- Creating a high level inter-agency group that would be tasked with developing long-term criminal justice strategies (to include strategies for managing both high risk and lower risk cases) monitoring progress, and developing solutions to a variety of issues such as housing for returning offenders, and improving access to community treatment opportunities.
- Promoting the development of front-line, inter-agency, collaborative case work teams that could more quickly address or resolve issues for higher risk cases.
- Developing a better internal understanding about the use of specific risk and needs assessment tools; and provide information to other criminal justice stakeholders (courts, prosecutors, defenders) about the use of risk and needs assessment tools by corrections and the parole board.
- Establishing methods for providing critical information to the public and other stakeholders about the work of corrections and the parole board. After the meeting, training was provided by CEPP to all parole board members (at the request of the board) on the topic of effective interviewing techniques – especially methods, questions, and approaches that might help to motivate positive behavior change.

Ultimately, Wyoming achieved many of these goals. The team:

- Recommended, and the Governor supported, the creation of an inter-agency team to focus on improving supervision, treatment, and management of higher risk offenders returning to the community.
- Encouraged the Governor to support pending legislation that would reduce the amount of time that parole violators spend in prison if parole is revoked.
- Requested support for training key criminal justice partners (judges, prosecutors and others) regarding the value and current use of risk/needs assessment tools.
- Recommended methods for improving communication and collaboration between the Parole Board and the Governor's Office.

## ***Iowa***

The members of the core team in Iowa included the governor's criminal justice policy advisor, the Director and two Deputy Directors of Corrections, several other key corrections managers, and the Chair of the Parole Board. Considerable information was provided by core team members during the Summit and first site visit about the status of their collaboration, their existing efforts, and some specific areas of concern. Ultimately, the team determined that the issues they would focus on for this effort included:

- Developing a more comprehensive strategy for managing high risk and lower risk cases. This strategy may involve the creation of high-level inter-agency team to develop responses, structure resources, and organize efforts.
- Developing and implementing more effective and appropriate responses to parole violations, consistent with evidence-based practices and public safety considerations.
- Creating a better understanding and making better use of risk and needs assessment information, both within institutions and with the parole board.

After the meeting, training was provided by CEPP to all parole board members (at their request) on methods that could be employed to make the best use of the time that is spent interviewing incarcerated individuals, and the most appropriate manner or method for receiving information from victims during hearings.

Iowa also successfully met their goals by the end of their participation in the project. In the end, the team:

- Recommended the development and coordination of public information strategies between the Parole Board, Department of Corrections, and the Governor's Office.
- Recommended exploring strategies to develop alternative responses to parole violations.
- Was taking steps to improve public and stakeholder education regarding the work of the Parole Board.

## ***Utah***

The core team in Utah was comprised of the governor's criminal justice policy advisor, the Deputy Director of Corrections for institutions, the Director of Field Supervision, the Chair of the Parole Board, a senior Parole Board member, and the Parole Board Administrator. During the initial site visit, the core team explored issues of greatest interest to them, and developed consensus regarding the following areas and actions.

- There is a need to improve information sharing across agency lines. One effort has been initiated that will examine the current system and consider methods that can be developed to help automate certain information for the parole board, and allow the board to access automated corrections information. Opportunities to effectively share information need to be further explored.
- In order to better focus responses to high and lower risk cases, a high level policy team needs to be created that can consider how risk and needs assessment information can be better utilized, and how risk reduction activities can be better accomplished.
- There is a need to improve support and collaboration between organizations, and a need to improve public and stakeholder education about the work of the parole board and corrections.

After the meeting, a discussion with all parole board members occurred (at their request), and training was provided by CEPP on issues related to developing a decision making guideline, and efforts that could be undertaken to streamline their case hearing process.

By the end of their participation in this initiative, the team from Utah had:

- Identified the need to focus on reentry and transition issues during cabinet and sub-cabinet meetings.
- Recommended the development of joint strategic planning effort between the Parole Board and Department of Corrections to improve understanding and resolve various issues.
- Recommended the development of an automated information technology system for the Parole Board (estimated initial cost of \$1.3 million) that would link with information systems used by the Department of Corrections.
- Requested support for improved quality assurance efforts for existing risk/needs assessment tools used by DOC.
- Taken steps to improve public and stakeholder education regarding the work and operation of the Parole Board.

### ***Rhode Island***

The core team in Rhode Island was composed of the governor's criminal justice policy advisor, the director of corrections and several key staff, the chair of the parole board, all parole board members, and representatives from several other key entities. During the site visit, the core team determined that the following areas would be the focus of their work on this project:

- How risk and needs assessment tools are being used generally, and how they are specifically being used to inform decision making by the parole board;

- The availability and use of programs to address criminogenic issues – both in facilities and in the community;
- The value of developing a more meaningful parole guideline that organizes and weighs the various factors that are appropriate for consideration by the parole board;
- A review of violation practices within Rhode Island, to include developing alternative responses to violations; and
- The need to develop a data plan that measures performance in key areas of interest.

By the conclusion of this initiative, Rhode Island had:

- Recommended development of an automated case plan that can follow an individual from prison to the community (recommended the state transition from a paper-based system to an automated case-management system that streamlines and improves record keeping, allows for the retrieval and sharing of important data metrics and helps track the status of parolees in the community) that will also provide the parole board with a 'critical indicators' data dashboard to inform release decision-making, condition-setting, and revocation.
- Recommended integrating evidence-based principles into Parole Board practices by improving the use of validated assessment tools in parole decision making and condition-setting.
- Recommended the exploration of alternative responses to parole violations to reduce the cycle of re-incarceration; including the development and implementation of a structured response grid in parole supervision to address violations as well as positive achievements of parolees in the community; and the development of an evaluation plan to assess fidelity to program objectives under this recommendation.