
An Overview of NIC's Transition from Prison to the Community Initiative

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During the first years of the 21st century, the field of corrections has been facing challenges unlike anything experienced before. Almost 700,000 prisoners were released from federal and state prisons in 2005, and the annual number of releases continues to grow. These individuals transition to communities all across the nation. Most are still under correctional supervision. A high percentage of them are rearrested in short order, and roughly two-thirds return to prison within 3 years—as a result of either new convictions or parole revocations. At the same time, many states are facing considerable budget shortfalls, prison populations continue to grow, and communities and policy-makers alike are asking how this cycle of failure and escalating costs can be interrupted.

In response to these concerns, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) launched its Transition from Prison to the Community (TPC) Initiative in 2001. The initiative was conceived from the beginning as an effort to draw together and synthesize the best thinking in the field—from practitioners and from researchers—on how to revamp correctional efforts to encourage the safe return of offenders to the community. Over 18 months during 2001 and 2002, NIC assembled working groups of practitioners, scholars, and policy advisers who met periodically to debate the lessons emerging from the field and from research that could help reshape practice.

The TPC Initiative has generated a number of outcomes. They include:

- ◆ **The TPC Model**, which outlines the elements of practice that, if fully implemented, represent the best thinking and evidence about how to manage transition and reentry successfully.
- ◆ **The TPC implementation strategy**, which outlines the sequence of tasks and decisions and the management approach needed to implement the model.
- ◆ **The accomplishments of eight states** that have embraced the TPC Model, and have—through their efforts—both transformed practice in their own states and provided significant lessons that will encourage and guide other jurisdictions interested in improving reentry practices. (The states are Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, and Rhode Island.)
- ◆ **A body of information and experience** that constitute a resource for states beyond the original eight participating TPC sites.

The NIC effort distinguishes itself in a number of ways. It is at once very specific but also far-reaching.

- ◆ On an agency-specific level, the TPC Initiative has provided hands-on guidance to the participating jurisdictions to support on-the-ground improvements in operating agencies, from which demonstrable results are already emerging. Participating jurisdictions received technical assistance from NIC, had opportunities to exchange information and experiences with other jurisdictions participating in the Initiative, and had occasion to participate in a number of cross-site workshops.
- ◆ The TPC Initiative is also far-reaching, because it has produced a model and an implementation strategy that other jurisdictions can draw upon, adapt, and use to guide change in their own unique circumstances.

TPC also is an approach that does not require significant additional resources to initiate. At its heart, the TPC Model is about system change and redeploying resources to accomplish desired outcomes. However, because of their work on TPC, a number of the participating states have been able to secure additional resources from their own state legislatures and from federal and private foundation funding.

Core Principles

It is said that the greatest insights are often the most simple. The TPC Model is, at its heart, very simple. It poses three major tenets.

- ◆ First, the goal is successful offender reentry to enhance public safety—no new crimes; no new victims; safer, stronger communities.
- ◆ Second, reentry is an issue that requires collaboration both within the often fragmented correctional arena and also across traditional boundaries—to include human service agencies, community organizations, and citizens. No one can do this alone, least of all corrections agencies.
- ◆ Third, we must base practice on evidence and do what we know works—and stop doing what we know doesn't work.

Though simple in concept, endeavors to truly enhance and support successful reentry are of course challenging and complex. For many years, corrections as a profession has focused more upon custody, control, and surveillance as a way to incapacitate offenders and thus protect community safety. The acknowledgement that virtually all offenders do return to the community, however, requires an expanded focus that includes a goal of behavior change for community safety. This is a significant shift for much of the corrections field. Collaboration—while ultimately sensible—also is a relatively new mode of doing business and flies in the face of the silos that characterize much of public policy. And basing practice on evidence, particularly in a field that only a few decades ago asserted that there

was no evidence that behavior could be changed, further requires a significant shift in outlook.

The jurisdictions that have participated to date in the TPC Initiative have recognized and taken on these complex challenges. They have demonstrated the essential soundness of the model, reshaped and improved it, and made it their own. Their efforts within the context of the TPC Model have generated significant change and improvements in how correctional systems operate, how they engage a wide range of stakeholders, and how they support more positive offender outcomes.

Sharing the Knowledge

A new *TPC Reentry Handbook* that explains the model, its implementation strategy, and the experiences of the eight participating states is slated for publication in 2008. The *Handbook* will include:

- ◆ Suggestions on how to organize a transition effort—whom to involve and how to organize participants into steering, implementation, and task groups;
- ◆ A step-by-step set of suggested activities that assist jurisdictions in stating their own vision and goals, collecting information to better define the transition challenges and strengths that are unique to their own situation, and identifying their targets of change;
- ◆ Examples of innovations that participating sites found to be important and helpful in revamping transition practices;
- ◆ Information describing how the principles of evidence-based practice can strengthen reentry efforts;
- ◆ An outline of a new approach to case management that supports transition and reentry; and
- ◆ A performance management strategy that is designed to measure progress.

In essence, the TPC Model is a framework that can assist jurisdictions to undertake system change that is designed to:

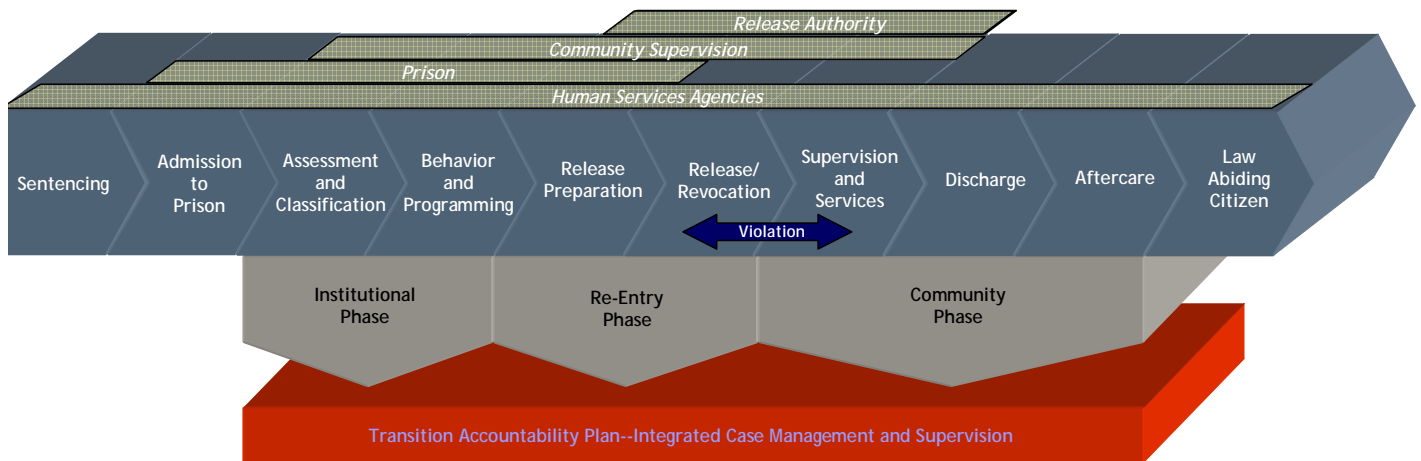
- ◆ Reduce recidivism among transitioning offenders,
- ◆ Reduce future victimization,
- ◆ Enhance public safety, and
- ◆ Improve the lives of community members, victims, and offenders.

Distinctive Elements of the TPC Model

The TPC Model is a framework that can assist jurisdictions in undertaking system change designed to improve offender transition. It outlines who should be involved and what steps to take in order to move from fragmented, ineffective practices to a collaborative, coherent process for transition. It outlines methods for working together to prepare offenders to reintegrate into the community safely, without reoffending.

Process and decision points are a seamless process. The TPC Model, depicted graphically in Figure 1, is conceived of as an integrated, continuous, and coherent process that bridges the components of the criminal justice system.

Figure 1. The Transition from Prison to the Community (TPC) Model



The TPC Model identifies the following key steps, seven of which (in bold) are also key decision points for corrections agencies.

- ◆ Sentencing
- ◆ Admission to prison
- ◆ **Assessment and classification**
- ◆ **Behavior and programming**
- ◆ **Release preparation**
- ◆ **Release decision-making**
- ◆ **Supervision and services**
- ◆ **Responses to violations**
- ◆ **Discharge**
- ◆ Aftercare

The process has an enormous impact on public safety, effective use of scarce public resources, and restoration of victims. As such, the community as well as public and private agencies have a stake in how well this process functions to support successful offender transition. The image of the TPC Model in Figure 1 highlights the different stakeholders across the top of the graphic, depicting overlapping periods of jurisdiction and concern. It also shows that the process rests, importantly, upon a foundation of sound transition accountability planning and integrated case management and supervision.

Community safety is attained through offender success. Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of the TPC Model is that it refocuses correctional practices on the goal of public safety through offender success, viewing virtually every aspect of correctional operations as an element in that overall strategy. This is a departure from corrections' recent emphasis on a risk management and surveillance strategy—based on using security levels and levels of supervision to target control by level of risk in both incarcerative and post-release settings. The TPC Model, alternatively, incorporates both risk management AND risk reduction as key interests.

Reentry is not considered as solely a corrections issue. Another aspect of the TPC Model is that it specifically defines reentry as an issue of importance to both correctional and non-correctional stakeholders. This perspective grows out of several key insights provided by those who developed the model.

- ◆ Because offenders who are transitioning have significant deficits and needs for services that are typically funded and/or provided by non-correctional agencies, those stakeholders must be part of developing a reentry strategy if offenders' needs are to be addressed.
- ◆ Agencies outside of corrections have mandates—from legislative funders, from their executive leadership, and from their communities—to serve certain populations. These populations often overlap significantly with the correctional population. As outside agencies become aware of the overlap, they are likely to identify key interests of their own that can be served by coming to the table to plan a collaborative strategy regarding reentry.
- ◆ This collaborative advantage can be a powerful incentive that brings partners to the table and engages them in mutually reinforcing efforts.

In sum, the TPC Model seeks to move correctional practice:

From—	To—
Focusing primarily on custody and monitoring . . .	Also including recidivism reduction through behavior change as a major focus.
Allowing management and information silos to fragment the transition process . . .	Redesigning efforts into a coherent process.
Defining transition as a corrections problem . . .	Defining transition as a public policy issue in which many stakeholders have an interest.
Using unproven methods . . .	Using practices based on evidence.
Measuring inputs . . .	Measuring outcomes.

Major Components of Implementation

The model itself defines the destination where we would like to arrive in order for transition and reentry efforts to be successful. The implementation process is akin to the “journey” we need to complete in order to arrive at that destination.

Jurisdictions using the TPC Model will be guided through a series of implementation steps.

- ◆ Mobilizing interdisciplinary, collaborative leadership teams, convened by corrections agencies, to guide reentry efforts at the state and local levels.
- ◆ Engaging in a rational planning process that includes a careful definition of goals as well as the development of a clear understanding of the current reentering offender population and their rates of recidivism, and a thoughtful review of existing policies, procedures, and resources for reentry.
- ◆ Deliberately involving non-correctional stakeholders—public, private, and community agencies that can provide services and support as reentry initiatives are planned and implemented.
- ◆ Implementing validated offender assessments at various stages of the offender’s movement through the system.
- ◆ Developing the capacity to create a Transition Accountability Plan (TAP) for each offender to guide case management and program interventions that span from the time of admission to prison until the time of discharge from supervision in the community.

- ◆ Targeting effective interventions—as demonstrated by good research—to individual offenders on the basis of risk and criminogenic needs that are identified by validated assessments.
- ◆ Ensuring that all transitioning offenders are equipped with basic survival resources, such as identification, housing, appropriate medications, and linkages to community services and informal networks of support before, while, and after they are released and move into the community.
- ◆ Expanding the traditional roles of correctional staff beyond custody, security, accountability, and monitoring to include a responsibility for offender management that uses an integrated approach to engage offenders in a process of change.
- ◆ Developing the capacity to measure the progress—of both individual agencies and the overall system—toward specific outcomes, to continually track such progress, and to use this information to achieve further improvements.

Over the course of working with the eight states that have been implementing the TPC Model, NIC and its cooperative agreement partner, the Center for Effective Public Policy, have participated in national and state-wide conferences, have posted information on the NIC web site, and are developing an e-learning module that will be available on the NIC e-learning site in early 2008. NIC also has collaborated in federal efforts to develop resources for a broad audience—most notably a forthcoming handbook that is emerging from the Serious and Violent Offender Rehabilitation Initiative (SVORI) efforts of BJA.

These efforts are adding to the store of knowledge and experience that are shaping improved transition and reentry practices nationwide. The efforts reported in this issue of *Topics in Community Corrections* are one indication of the changes occurring in the field—changes that have been supported and mirrored by the TPC Initiative. ◆

For more information:

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Resources

- ◆ NIC's home page for information and resources on the TPC Initiative is <http://www.nicic.org/TPCI>
- ◆ To enroll in NIC's web-based training on reentry (available in early 2008), go to <http://nic.learn.com/>
- ◆ See page 74 for more sources for information on transition/reentry.