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# Collaboration and Partnership in the Community: Advancing the Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative

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*“With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it, nothing can succeed.”*

Abraham Lincoln, August 21, 1858

Understanding how to use partnerships and collaboration is critical for any agency that seeks to advance its efforts toward prisoner reentry. By using community partnerships effectively, prisoner reentry efforts can transform corrections systems and communities to better protect neighborhoods and interrupt the costly cycle of crime.

Collaboration has been defined as joining together to make possible that which cannot be accomplished alone (Center for Effective Public Policy, 2007). This article examines five key attributes of partnership and collaboration deemed essential as the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) developed the Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative (MPRI).

1. **“Systems thinking”** is the lens for understanding why partnerships are important to prisoner reentry efforts. Based on the help of some of the nation’s best thinkers, and grounded in a systems perspective, the MPRI Model makes the connection between transforming the corrections system into an evidence-based system and reducing crime. If public stakeholders do not understand this linkage, they may not value the work toward system change that is essential to prisoner reentry initiatives, which may impede these efforts.
2. **Fostering unified commitment** is the first step to building sustainable reentry partnerships. In Michigan, we first cultivated unified commitment by engaging hundreds of stakeholders in the development of MPRI’s vision, mission, and policy recommendations.
3. **Organizing and structuring partnerships** is an important aspect of implementing innovative ways to conduct the business of corrections under the MPRI Model. For partnerships to be effective, their power must be harnessed through strong operational structures.
4. **Catalyzing change** is essential for mobilizing prisoner reentry partnerships. The MPRI relies heavily on a cadre of highly qualified and trained Community Coordinators in local districts to catalyze communities’ investment in transforming the corrections system.

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**5. Mutual capacity building** is achieved when partnerships are effective. Through mutual capacity building, permanent system change is made possible.

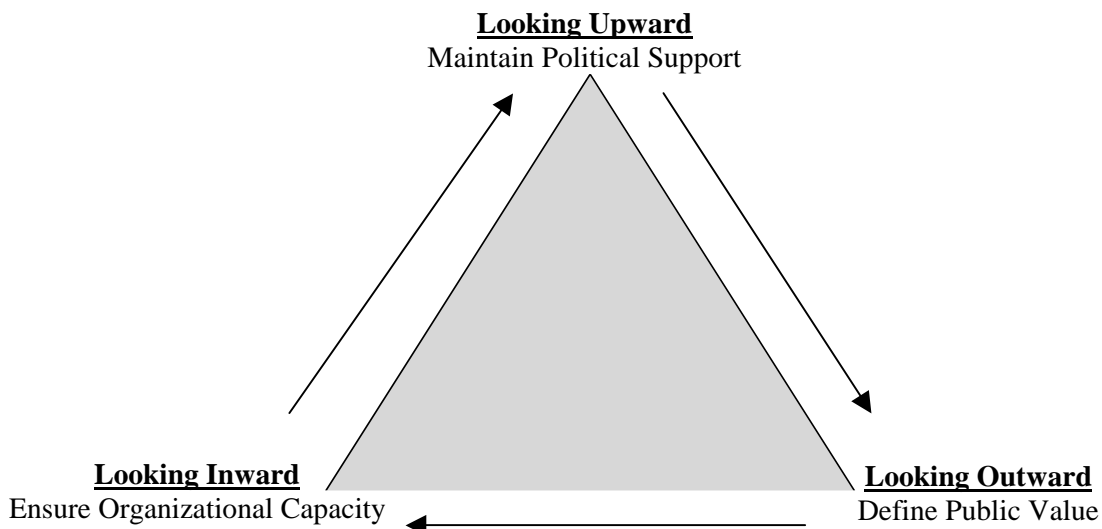
### Systems Thinking

“Systems thinking” is a concept explained by Dot Faust, Elise Clawson, and Lore Joplin in NIC’s 2004 document, *Implementing Evidence-based Principles in Community Corrections: Leading Organizational Change and Development*. The authors state that collaboration and partnership-building with stakeholders are necessary to ensure that those entities understand and support the organization’s vision and incremental efforts.

Mark Moore provides a framework for system change known as the Strategic Management Triangle. (See Figure 1, below.) His idea is rooted in the assertion that creating public value is the first responsibility of public leaders. By defining public value, building the internal and external organizational support that aligns with that value, and establishing the capacity to achieve it, systems can be transformed.

Any effort—such as the MPRI—that is focused on changing a publicly managed system must have value to key stakeholders. Unless policymakers, funders, and the public at large recognize the value of the effort, they won’t support it.

**Figure 1. The Strategic Management Triangle**



Adapted from Moore, Mark, *Strategic Management in Government*, Harvard University Press, October 1995.  
As referenced by the National Institute of Corrections publication, *Implementing Evidence-based Principles in Community Corrections: Leading Organizational Change and Development*.

Essentially, reentry efforts must build political will. Reentry implementation strategies must incorporate the often incongruous perspectives of many stakeholders. The systems perspective of the MPRI Model was founded on the assumption that our reentry initiative could not succeed without the support of community leaders. These necessary partnerships were formed during the initial planning of the MPRI Model and have been sustained during its implementation over the last 3 years.

## **Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative Model: Safer Neighborhoods, Better Citizens**

Michigan's focus on prisoner reentry represents a convergence of three major schools of thought on how to develop and fully implement a comprehensive system for prisoner transition planning. In this way, the MPRI provides a synergistic model for prisoner reentry that is deeply influenced by the nation's best thinkers on how to improve former prisoners' success.

Development of the MPRI Model was launched in 2003. The specific elements of the model are presented in Figure 2, below. The model begins with the three-phase reentry approach of the U.S. Department of Justice's Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI). It further delineates the transition process by adding the seven decision points of the Transition from Prison to Community (TPC) Model promulgated by the National Institute of Corrections. Also incorpo-

**Figure 2. The Three-Phase, Seven-Decision-Point MPRI Model**

The MPRI Model involves improved decision-making at seven critical decision points in the three phases of the custody, release, and community supervision/discharge process.

### **PHASE ONE—GETTING READY**

The institutional phase describes the details of events and responsibilities which occur during the offender's imprisonment from admission until the point of the parole decision.

Phase One involves the first two major decision points:

- 1. Assessment and classification:** Measuring the offender's risks, needs, and strengths.
- 2. Prisoner programming:** Assignments to reduce risk, address need, and build on strengths.

### **PHASE TWO—GOING HOME**

The transition to the community, or reentry, phase begins approximately 6 months before the offender's target release date. In this phase, highly specific reentry plans are organized that address housing, employment, and services to address addiction and mental illness.

Phase Two involves the next two major decision points:

- 3. Prisoner release preparation:** Developing a strong, public-safety-conscious parole plan.
- 4. Release decision making:** Improving parole release guidelines.

### **PHASE THREE—STAYING HOME**

The community and discharge phase begins when the prisoner is released from prison and continues until discharge from community parole supervision. In this phase, it is the responsibility of the former prisoner, human services providers, and the offender's network of community supports and mentors to assure continued success.

Phase Three involves the final three major decision points of the transition process:

- 5. Supervision and services:** Providing flexible and firm supervision and services.
- 6. Revocation decision making:** Using graduated sanctions to respond to behavior.
- 7. Discharge and aftercare:** Determining community responsibility to "take over" the case.

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rated into its approach are the policy statements and recommendations from the Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council, a project coordinated by the Council of State Governments.

Michigan had the tremendous benefit of support for this work from the National Governors' Association (NGA) and the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), each of which provided substantial resources for consultation, research, training, and technical assistance. Through the grant from NGA, the MPRI is also using ZIP-code-based mapping of parolees in Michigan, conducted by the Urban Institute, as part of our intensive strategic-planning process. The knowledge base being created by the MPRI is unprecedented.

### **Unified Commitment**

With support from NIC and the JEHT Foundation, MDOC engaged Public Policy Associates, Inc., and the Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency to convene hundreds of stakeholders to define the vision and mission of the MPRI.

- ◆ **The *vision* of the MPRI** is for every prisoner released into the community to have the tools needed to succeed.
- ◆ **The *mission* of the MPRI** is to reduce crime by implementing a seamless system of services and supervision developed with each prisoner—delivered through state and local collaboration—from the time of their entry into prison, through their transition, reintegration, and aftercare in the community.

We used a carefully thought-out process to ground these concepts into a Michigan-specific model. The stakeholders were brought together, organized into seven workgroups to correspond with NIC's seven TPC decision points, and given the task of reviewing the report of the Re-Entry Policy Council. Through this process, the workgroups customized the recommendations and policy statements specifically for use in Michigan.

This process of engaging stakeholders to develop the MPRI Model lasted almost a full year. It resulted in unprecedented, unified commitment to design a comprehensive strategy for combatting crime and recidivism in the State of Michigan.

### **Organizing and Structuring Partnerships**

Michigan is poised for success through a combination of a strong mandate from Governor Jennifer M. Granholm and Corrections Director Patricia L. Caruso, a powerful policy framework, and strong community buy-in. The challenge now is statewide implementation at a scale of 13,000 prisoners per year transitioning successfully from prison. Strong and sustained local capacity is the single most critical aspect of the MPRI implementation process. Without resilient local partnerships, successful prisoner reentry simply is not possible.

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Statewide implementation of the MPRI Model has taken place over a 3-year period. The implementation effort began with eight pilot sites in fiscal year (FY) 2006, which ended in September 2006. During FY 2007, another seven sites incorporated the lessons learned from the initial pilot sites, bringing us to a total of 15 fully operational jurisdictions covering 75% of the state. In FY 2008, implementation will be completed in the rest of the state.

A standard operational structure at each site enables the statewide plan to be realized by local agency and community actors. Three key groups perform essential roles in completing the range of activities needed for full implementation of the MPRI Model.

- ◆ **Local reentry advisory councils.** These groups advise, inform, and support the implementation process along the same lines as the statewide MPRI Advisory Council. The councils are created to build support for local implementation of the MPRI Model and to educate the community on how the initiative will create safer neighborhoods and better citizens. Each advisory council may have as many as 150 members.
  
- ◆ **Steering teams.** Steering teams develop, oversee, and monitor the local implementation process and coordinate local community involvement in the overall statewide MPRI development process. Each steering team includes members from MPRI partner agencies that provide services necessary for successful reentry, such as homelessness prevention organizations, workforce development boards, and substance abuse treatment providers. These representatives are active on their steering teams because of the strong mandate from Governor Granholm for multi-agency collaboration and participation and because MDOC leaders encourage and empower their involvement.

Each local steering team is led by four co-chairs:

- The warden of the area prison from which prisoners are released to the community site;
- A parole supervision representative from the local Michigan DOC Field Operations Administration office; and
- Two community representatives drawn from the large number of local faith, human service, and planning organizations that are critical to local reentry efforts.

The co-chairs may work out of the local parole office. They work directly with their site's Community Coordinator, a vital and specialized position that essentially "staffs" the steering team under the guidance of the four co-chairs. The specific responsibilities of the Community Coordinator are described in the next section.

- ◆ **Transition teams.** These teams support offenders in the transition planning process and guide them from the institution back into the community through a case-management approach. Teams include key local service providers and are drawn from the membership of the steering teams. Their main responsibility is to provide essential input for developing and implementing Transition Accountability Plans (TAPs) for offenders in the reentry, community supervision, and discharge phases of the MPRI Model.

Each transition team is led by the Field Operations Administration parole representative, who, as noted, also serves as a co-chair of the steering team. This reflects the function of the parole agent in working toward parolee success under a case management model. (Our case management work in the future will be more directly guided by evidence-based practices.)

### **The Coordinator's Role in Catalyzing Change**

Michigan's MPRI communities have become dedicated champions of improved offender reentry, and their determined and specific preparation for prisoners who will transition back to their communities is already resulting in less crime. Building the capacity for system reform, however, requires guidance and support for local efforts toward education, training, planning, and implementation. This is the role of the local Community Coordinator—to help the community effectively prepare for prisoner reentry while MDOC is better preparing prisoners for release.

The MPRI Model requires convening, organizing, and eliciting buy-in and investment from the community; planning for sustainability; and ensuring quality results throughout the transition process. The Community Coordinators who do this work receive training and technical support from the Michigan Council and Crime and Delinquency and Public Policy Associates, Inc., on how to manage these processes based on the MPRI Model.

**Necessary qualities.** Community Coordinators provide four key ingredients for successful community organizing. As adapted from the James Irvine Foundation's publication, *Community Catalyst*, they are:

- ◆ **Capacity.** Each Community Coordinator must have the capacity to work on prisoner reentry. Indicators of adequate capacity include experience, resources to apply to the work, and relationships with key stakeholders.
- ◆ **Commitment.** Each Community Coordinator must demonstrate a dedicated commitment to prisoner reentry and be able to foster the development of this commitment within the local community.
- ◆ **Credibility.** The Community Coordinator must demonstrate credibility within the community.
- ◆ **Knowledge.** The Community Coordinator must understand prisoner reentry and its implications to effectively mobilize change within the community.

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**Essential skills.** Implementing the MPRI Model for reentry requires a precise and extensive set of skills that are the hallmarks of the Community Coordinators who staff the local development process throughout the state.

- ◆ **Communication.** The Community Coordinators must have excellent communication skills, both written and verbal, to facilitate connectedness among all the stakeholders in the implementation. Communication must be facilitated in both directions between the local communities and the statewide MPRI managers.
- ◆ **Community convening.** The Community Coordinators must be able to bring diverse stakeholders together, build consensus around prisoner reentry issues, and catalyze action and leadership within their communities toward transition planning.
- ◆ **Community organization.** The coordinator’s role in organizing within communities involves training Steering Team and Transition Team members, facilitating ReEntry Advisory Council meetings, and building partnerships among key stakeholder groups.
- ◆ **Brokering.** Community Coordinators frequently act as a broker within communities. They need the ability to maintain a degree of neutrality so that they can negotiate effectively through community conflict. Extensive skills in brokering and fostering neutrality are central requirements of a Community Coordinator.
- ◆ **Coordination.** The implementation planning associated with MPRI presents quite a challenge. Community Coordinators need to work hard to maintain connectedness with and among community stakeholders, providers, and related activities.
- ◆ **Systems building.** Building systems and shepherding change across systems requires a complex set of skills and much hands-on experience. The Community Coordinator must have experience in building and managing systemwide change.

**Core responsibilities.** The involvement of Michigan’s communities in the MPRI revolves around three main focus areas. Within each area, specific tasks fall to the MPRI Community Coordinators.

**FOCUS AREA ONE: Community Involvement in the MPRI Process.** Essential to the MPRI Model is hands-on involvement to ensure that each of the seven primary decision points in reentry is deeply influenced by the perspectives and input of the local community. The iterative process of refining the model requires open communication and effective coordination to ensure that community input is captured, the community has an accurate understanding of the model, and expectations for implementation are clearly defined.



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Each of the major decision points for improved prisoner reentry under the MPRI Model must involve community input and collaboration. Without local community involvement, the process would be viewed as “top-down” and would undoubtedly miss the opportunities for local expertise and experience at the ground level where service delivery must be focused. The community role in each of the seven decision points begins at the first meeting of the MPRI Advisory Council, and it continues to be one of the hallmarks of the design and implementation process in Michigan.

The seven decision points affect the policies and practices that apply to the offender transition process—each of which must be adapted as a result of community input and involvement. The affected policies and practices provide a rich context for an examination of the community’s role in the MPRI and thus a guide to the work to be done.

The primary role of the MPRI Community Coordinator is to be the “point person” who channels the community’s input so that the services of key local stakeholders can be adjusted accordingly, and who maintains communications systems that ensure everyone is clear about the MPRI process and has a voice in its development.

**Task 1.** *The Community Coordinator ensures that information from each prisoner’s TAP is provided to the local MPRI transition team.*

**Task 2.** *The Community Coordinator ensures that local MDOC Field Operations staff share with the local transition team timely information on the targeted or earliest release date of each offender and the status of each offender’s movement to the facility nearest his or her city of return.*

**Task 3.** *The Community Coordinator ensures that the local reentry parole agent is coordinating the interaction of the transition team with staff of the local prison and also is convening and facilitating local team meetings to develop a TAP for each releasee.*

**Task 4.** *The Community Coordinator oversees the use of the TAP as a “hand-off” for transfer of the parolee’s case to responsible parties in the community who will continue providing services and guidance when the individual discharges from parole supervision.*



**FOCUS AREA TWO: Community Assets, Policy Barriers, and Gaps in Services.** In each locality, it is necessary to identify community assets that can be applied to improve parolee success, any policy and operational barriers that may exist among state and local agencies that are potentially involved in reentry, and any service gaps that can be filled with state, federal, and local funding.

**Task 5.** *The Community Coordinator organizes the community-assessment task of evaluating the assets, barriers, and service gaps relevant to reentry that are present in the local area.*



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**FOCUS AREA THREE: Community-Based Comprehensive Prisoner Reentry Plans.** Local teams develop Comprehensive Prisoner ReEntry Plans that articulate the framework, rationale, and funding scheme for improved policies, practices, and programs in their community. The success of these efforts is measured by reduced crime and fewer returns to prison. The Community Coordinator facilitates the local process and provides the staff support needed to write the Comprehensive Plan.



**Task 6.** *The Community Coordinator ensures the development and completion of the Comprehensive Prisoner ReEntry Plan in each locality.*

### Mutual Capacity Building

The partnerships that have allowed Michigan to advance the MPRI Model have also opened the door to mutual capacity-building that removes the boundaries of “us” and “them” and leads to greater awareness that crime and justice affect everyone. By collaborating with the community and local partners in reentry, corrections agencies help to catalyze transformative changes in all of the systems and agencies that contribute to keeping our neighborhoods safe.

Though MPRI is still in its early stages of implementation, it has already generated a better than 25% decrease in recidivism by prisoners who have transitioned through the MPRI process. These gains illustrate the power of partnership and its culmination in a mutual capacity-building that can effect the change necessary to protect our neighborhoods. By maintaining a focus on systems thinking, sustaining a unified commitment, organizing and structuring partnerships, and catalyzing change, the MPRI Model is one example of how collaboration and partnership can build capacity and improve the safety of local communities. ♦

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### Resources

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