

MINNESOTA COMPREHENSIVE OFFENDER REENTRY PLAN

The Challenge

Minnesota, like many other states, is experiencing steady growth in the number of offenders entering prison. Successfully preparing offenders for reentry is an investment in public safety and the social and economic health of families and communities throughout the state.

The Planning Process

The Minnesota reentry strategy is built on three major schools of thought: lessons learned from a federal grant, work from the National Institute of Corrections' (NIC) Transition from Prison to Community Initiative, and the National Governors Association's (NGA) *Reentry Policy Council Report*.

The Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) developed a long-term reentry strategy based on three

- *33% increase in the prison population in the last six years (FY2002-2008)*
- *2% projected increase in the prison population each year to 2013*
- *95% of incarcerated offenders return to the community (7,796 in FY2007)*
- *36% reconviction rate three years post-release*

components: a rational planning process, offender management practices, and multi-agency collaboration.

Phase I of a pilot project began with an identified target population of offenders. This population consisted of offenders leaving prison who will return to Hennepin, Ramsey and Dodge-Fillmore-Olmsted Counties. These are communities that receive some of the highest number of returning offenders in Minnesota.

In 2007, Minnesota was one of five states selected to participate in the NGA's Prisoner Reentry Policy Academy. Technical assistance is offered to each state as they move their reentry initiatives forward.

Offender Management Practices

Successful offender reentry begins at the point an offender enters prison, continues through his or her prison experience, and follows with reentry to the community as a productive, law-abiding citizen. To better prepare offenders for successful reentry, the DOC is organizing around the three phases identified in the NIC's *Transition from Prison to Community Initiative*: the institution phase, the transition phase, and the community reintegration phase.

The DOC has created a reentry services unit to oversee reentry planning and implementation. A director and two reentry managers carry out the work of the reentry

initiative. This unit manages the first phase of the pilot project and all transition programming at the facilities. Currently, the department and community have multiple services in place designed to aid offenders through transition and reentry. One goal of this initiative is to coordinate those services into a comprehensive approach.

Multi-Agency Collaboration

In early 2005, the DOC created the Minnesota Comprehensive Offender Reentry Plan (MCORP), a strategic initiative between invested state agencies, the courts, and the community, to plan and oversee the state-wide offender reentry approach. Joining the DOC, the following entities have committed to the success of MCORP:

- Minnesota Department of Education
- Minnesota Department of Employment & Economic Development (DEED)
- Minnesota Department of Health
- Minnesota Housing Finance Agency
- Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS)
- Minnesota State Courts Administration
- The three pilot areas

The mission of MCORP is to identify points of intersection and collaboration between the state and community-provided services available to offenders who are either in transition or community reentry.

Services and planning will be organized around the criminogenic needs of offenders, as measured by the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R). Case plans will be developed and reviewed targeting high-risk need areas for each target population offender.

MCORP Accomplishments

- 1) A website has been established for MCORP and can be found at <https://forums.doc.state.mn.us/site/mcorp/default.aspx>.
- 2) A “gaps analysis” was conducted by the MCORP steering committee to guide development of the pilot project and identify the target population.
- 3) An MCORP budget was proposed by the governor and funded by the 2007 legislature.
- 4) Grants to carry out pilot project services have been awarded to the participating counties.
- 5) Advisory groups, made up of local leaders and service providers in pilot project counties, have been established.
- 6) The phase I target population offenders were released to the community by the end of calendar year 2008.
- 7) Phase II target population offenders have been identified, and facility services to that group of offenders have begun.
- 8) The 2007 legislature awarded four additional reentry-related grants, over and above the dollar amount appropriated for MCORP. The DOC has awarded and is administering those grants, which will continue through the current biennium.
- 9) Collaborations as a result of agency involvement in MCORP:
 - a) A child support liaison, funded jointly by the DOC and DHS, identifies offenders with child support arrears, counsels offenders, and links child support agencies to the DOC.
 - b) The DOC and DPS collaborate to create state ID documents and driver’s licenses for transitioning offenders prior to release from prison.
 - c) The DOC and DEED have joined efforts to study the implementation of secure computer access to the state’s website so that offenders may look for employment prior to release from prison.
 - d) Two workforce centers operated by DEED conduct offender workshops on how to use their services to job search and prepare for job interviews.
 - e) The DOC and the State Public Defender’s Office have collaborated to create a law school clinic that provides reentry-related legal issue mentoring by law students for offenders at the state’s female institution. Mentoring occurs during the transition phase and continues following release from prison.
- f) The DOC received pass-through funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to conduct listening sessions with offenders and community members in the three MCORP pilot areas. The purpose of the sessions was to examine issues affecting both offenders and the communities to which they return. The DOC partnered with the New Living Way Christian Center and the Council on Crime & Justice to present a community forum, *Engaging Communities in Prisoner Reentry*, that reported on the findings of the listening sessions. This was a first step in drawing communities into the process of offender reentry.

Federal Grant

In 2007, the DOC was awarded a \$450,000 federal grant through the Prisoner Reentry Initiative. With this grant, reentry best practices are demonstrated in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties.

Two reentry coordinators, trained in the use of evidence-based practices, develop case plans with the participation of offenders who are transitioning from the Minnesota Correctional Facility-Faribault. The reentry coordinators provide counseling and services to these offenders during the first several months following their release.



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