Abstract

Halfway houses intend to reduce recidivism by providing housing, treatments, trainings, and services to offenders as they move between prison and community. In Pennsylvania, parolees who move through the residential community corrections centers after prison were more likely to recidivate than those who moved directly back into the community. The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has determined that recidivism rates for offenders going through halfway houses are too high given budget allocations. This program evaluation of the current referral processes for offenders on probation and parole revealed several areas that could be optimized. Our main recommendations are: (1) merge the DOC and Board of Probation and Parole, (2) evaluate communication strategies, (3) strengthen risk assessments, (4) improve the home plan approval process, and (5) ensure future evaluation designs are robust and objective. By further evaluating the roles of risk assessment, placement, and communication in recidivism outcomes, the DOC can better promote community safety and reduce the incidence of recidivism.
# Table of Contents

Executive Summary .................................................................................................................. 2
Context .................................................................................................................................. 3
Methods ................................................................................................................................. 6
Findings ................................................................................................................................. 9
Recommendations .................................................................................................................. 19
Future Research ...................................................................................................................... 23
Conclusion .............................................................................................................................. 26
Appendices ............................................................................................................................. 28
  Appendix A: Experts Consulted ............................................................................................ 28
  Appendix B: Program Evaluation ......................................................................................... 29
  Appendix C: SPin Evaluation ............................................................................................... 37
  Appendix D: Communication in Referral Process ............................................................... 39
Endnotes .................................................................................................................................. 42
Executive Summary

The Bureau of Community Corrections (BCC) within the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) presides over an extensive system of residential and nonresidential service and treatment options for those leaving prison and entering into society. The system includes 15 state-operated Community Corrections Centers (CCCs) and 45 Community Contract Facilities (CCFs), also known as halfway houses. Residential services at these centers might include housing assistance, mentoring, workforce development, alcohol and drug services, sex offender treatment, and mental health services. The BCC and Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole (PBPP) work together to assign nonresidential and residential services to those released from prison and parole violators to ensure successful integration back into society. The DOC has determined that recidivism rates for offenders who were placed in a halfway house are too high given budget allocations to the halfway house system.

A University of Cincinnati study conducted in 2009 found that parolees who moved through the residential community corrections centers after prison were more likely to recidivate than those who moved directly back into the community. A similar study was conducted by staff at the DOC in 2012, and the study reaffirmed the results concluded by the University of Cincinnati. Based to these findings, the conclusion is that the DOC’s system of referrals is in need of repair.

Our original scope contained four deliverables: (1) map the current referral process, (2) review prior work from other strategic planning projects, (3) develop a profile of the community corrections population by examining characteristics and needs, and (4) calculate and compare recidivism rates by various characteristics to inform optimal placements. The scope shifted slightly as we learned more about the DOC’s referral process and analyzed the data sample they provided. Due to the infinite complexity of the process and concerns that an imperfect process might have a large impact on offender outcomes, we focused on examining system complexities through a thorough process evaluation. With the help of expert advice, we made the decision that building an ethical model to predict optimal placements of future offenders was not feasible using the historical data provided. We instead examined methods of improving referral processes, risk assessments, home plan approval processes, and communication.
This assessment of system processes was couched in a program evaluation framework. We completed a literature review and evaluation of the current context, while also briefly examining other states’ systems. Through extensive interviews with staff members of the DOC and PBPP, we were able to uncover additional insights on the referral processes. These interviews also consisted of site visits to two halfway houses and a parole office in Allegheny County. After gathering information, we used data analysis to evaluate the risk assessment tools and home plan data.

The areas for improvement identified through our research and analysis were risk assessment, communication, and placement. The Level of Services Inventory - Revised (LSI-R) assessment is a highly imperfect tool that does not account for certain static factors like age which are known to be highly correlated with recidivism outcomes. It also combines risk and treatment assessments, which might cause inefficiencies and administrators exercising inappropriate discretion. For communication, we evaluated channels between departments and facilities throughout the referral process as well as communication between Harrisburg and field offices. DOC and PBPP use different communication methods and have different definitions of recidivism, which might lead to confusion in information exchanges and program evaluations. There is a lack of established communication lines that would permit field personnel to provide feedback and input regarding the implementation of new policies and procedures. Finally, the placement of offenders is constrained by a lack of financial resources, assignment discretion, and the regional variability of resources across the Commonwealth. Home plan approval varies throughout the state, and some areas have much higher rejection rates than others.

**Context**

*Institutional Context*

The Bureau of Community Corrections resides under the authority of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. The Board of Probation and Parole operates as a separate entity. While the two departments are separate at the lower levels of the organizational chart, both DOC and PBPP report to the Pennsylvania Office of the Governor. The common goal for both departments is to ensure that offenders are placed in the right environment which will help to
reduce their chances of recidivating. The two departments are tasked with efficaciously and cost-effectively serving a high-needs population. Each individual who leaves prison has their own set of needs and problems, including housing, counseling, employment, and a plethora of other constraints related to placement. This variability, individual needs, and the separation of departments complicate the process of placing offenders.

When placing those recently released from prison, the public is entrusting both the DOC and PBPP to make placement decisions that will guarantee public safety is upheld. To do this, the DOC and PBPP must place offenders in environments that will help to reduce the chances that an offender will commit another crime. Both DOC and PBPP are tasked with using their resources and knowledge to reduce recidivism among the released population. Reducing recidivism will help to secure public safety and encourage the offender to acclimate back into society. Mistakes made during the process can become very public, especially if the crime committed by the offender threatens or harms public safety. Those given the responsibility of placing these offenders and supervising them in the community must be able to do multiple jobs at once. For example, a parole officer must at times perform some of the functions of counselor, disciplinarian, social worker, officer of the law, and technician. The diverse skill set needed to work within the corrections system can be taxing for any employee, and is tied to various components to institutional capacity.

**Budget Context**

Currently, the DOC spends approximately $120 million per year funding residential services such as halfway houses. Another $10 million is used to fund non-residential services. The current budget allocated to the DOC will be cut significantly in the near future, placing financial pressure on the entire department. Since halfway houses constitute such a significant portion of the DOC budget, the number of beds and/or length of stay may be cut up to 50%. It is unclear whether non-residential services will also be cut significantly, but priorities may nevertheless shift. Both the DOC and PBPP are responsible for maintaining or improving offender outcomes following the budget cuts. The departments must continue to place individuals, provide services, and reduce recidivism with fewer monetary resources to help reach these goals. Assuming the number of offenders will remain constant, the DOC and PBPP must find ways to make cuts in
the areas of services and housing, or must resolve to place more offenders back into community, as non-residential services are often cheaper than residential services which tend to be associated costs related to housing, meals, etc.

**Overall Department Context**

The institutional separation of DOC and PBPP might lead to structural problems in the process of placing offenders. If the departments are not in constant communication following standardized protocol, priorities and the sharing of ideas may be fragmented. Also, both departments have conflicting definitions regarding basic vocabulary that is essential to the placement process and understandings of recidivism. DOC defines recidivism as starting with re-arrest on a new crime following release, or a technical parole violation that results in placement in some type of correctional facility. Recidivism, as defined by PBPP, starts when an offender is rearrested or reincarcerated, or placed back in a correctional facility after a probation/parole violation and due process has sustained the decision to re-incarcerate. Conflicting definitions can lead to misunderstandings in both the DOC and PBPP, making cooperation between the departments even more difficult. In addition to internal operations, having two definitions may confuse offenders working their way through the reentry process.

A recent development involving the merging of DOC and PBPP research departments will hopefully yield positive results and demonstrate the institutional benefits of consistency, common vocabulary, and partnership in research and program evaluation. This small-scale merger might function as a “test run” for merging other departmental functions.

The overall structure of the DOC and PBPP is complex, with multiple sub-departments, contractors, treatment centers, and other governmental agencies. Due to this complexity, program evaluation is difficult. It is challenging for departments to isolate the effects of singular processes and programs on offender outcomes. For example, the placement of an offender in a treatment center may have a large effect on their propensity to commit another crime. However, it may not be the treatment center that has the greatest effect, but other factors that promote or discourage recidivism such as the location of the center, services offered, the quality of services, and a host of other factors.
Methods

General Methodology

To evaluate the current context and attain background knowledge, we reviewed existing literature on recidivism, risk assessment tools, and the structure of the Pennsylvania corrections system as it compares to that of other states. Research on other states was somewhat limited due to a lack of publicly available data. We also conducted a thorough review of documents provided by the DOC including the Re-entry Services Needs Assessment (ReSNA) results, the 2009 University of Cincinnati study, the 2013 PADOCS recidivism report, and summaries of offender services.¹

Most our project consisted of process evaluation through document review and key informant interviews. BCC Deputy Director Dan McIntyre provided several documents mapping the current referral processes and proposing changes to be implemented in the future. We also reviewed home plan contracts, the fifty-four questions of the LSI-R assessment, summaries of the sanctioning process, brochures for alternative risk assessments like SPin, etc. The theoretical understanding and formulated questions from the document review served as starting points for interviews with DOC and Parole Board staff across the community corrections parole system. In addition to asking pre-constructed questions, we allowed interviews to organically unfold in order to gather salient information from experts.

Key insights came from in-person tours of two CCCs and ride-along visits with parole officers in Pittsburgh. Region 3 Director Morris Richardson took us through CCC Riverside as well as Renewal in downtown Pittsburgh, which resulted in impromptu interviews with staff members at Renewal. In April, we interviewed parole officers in Pittsburgh and witnessed firsthand some of their daily tasks including site visits, correspondence with police stations, and home plan approvals.

A list of experts from DOC, PBPP, and the Heinz College whom we consulted at various stages of the project can be found in Appendix A.
Program Evaluation

Since current recidivism rates and expenditures suggest the system is in need of repair, we approached this project using a program evaluation framework (see Appendix B for complete documentation of our program evaluation methodology). As described in the previous section, we first examined the current situation and the political context to prevent fallacious assumptions and establish baseline knowledge. This context evaluation allowed us to later determine alignment between the situation on the ground, the needs of offenders, program theory, the ways in which referral processes function in practice, and outcomes related to recidivism.

Due to the scope and nature of the project, we did not conduct a formal needs assessment. There are several existing assumptions about the needs of the target population through the very processes of arrest and incarceration in a corrections system. The institutional environment is helpful in narrowing our focus to a target population of existing offenders that is predefined by legal statutes. Certain needs assessment elements were still highly relevant to our project; for example, we assumed that the various treatment needs implicit in the LSI-R are continuous for at least the short-term following release and constitute a preliminary list for our outcome evaluation. We also examined subpopulations’ needs related to halfway house occupancy (versus direct placement in community) in the process and outcome evaluation stages of the project.

Program theory evaluation tests the logical links between intended service provision/utilization and the results in practice. The evaluation relies on the assumption that the primary intentions of any program administered by DOC or PBPP are to reduce recidivism and promote community safety. However, both agencies should critically assess whether these intentions hold true for every program and employee involved in every institutional process. We sought to answer several questions, including the following:

- How do administrators and employees of halfway houses intend to reduce recidivism?
- How do parole officers intend to reduce recidivism?
- What are the goals for communication type and frequency with offenders?

The answers to these and similar questions indicated that there may be significant discretion at various points in the referral process, and there are not clear institutional answers regarding intent to maintain or reduce discretion. There also might be significant variation in needs and
outcomes among offender categories, subpopulations, regions, or even specific centers. While DOC and PBPP intend to reduce recidivism and promote community safety through residential services and housing in CCCs, processes and outcomes might not sufficiently reflect institutional efforts.

The process evaluation phase informs all the other three stages of evaluation and assesses the implementation fidelity of the theory evaluation. We conducted a multidisciplinary evaluation of the Pennsylvania community corrections processes through document reviews and key informant interviews. The process evaluation examined system processes related to communication, assessment, placement, and system capacity. It became immediately clear that if the community corrections and parole system has not installed the required processes, systems, and practices to support successful outcomes and intentions of program theory, DOC and PBPP administrators must identify and remediate associated barriers.

Through a document review, we first identified the critical inflows and outflows between State Correctional Institutions (SCI), CCCs, and community. Residential placements generally fall into the following categories: (1) parolees released from SCI that need community corrections placement, (2) State Intermediate Punishment (SIP) offenders supervised by DOC on a two-year flat sentence, and (3) parolees in the community who are in danger of violating parole stipulations (halfway backs). Because SIP constitutes a relatively small population, we primarily examined the flows of SCI releases and halfway backs. Residential placement for parolees could depend on conditional release, severe treatment needs, or inability to secure a home plan. We pursued further process and outcome evaluation related to home plans since it seemed possible that there could be discretion within the home plan approval process.

In addition to general review of the home plan approval process, we evaluated risk assessment tools and their implications within all aspects of community corrections and parole systems. Specifically, we noted that there might be system-wide effects if the LSI-R or other tools have poor interrelated reliability and/or validity.
For the outcome evaluation, we generated descriptive statistics based on data provided by the PA Department of Corrections Bureau of Research, Planning, and Statistics. This data was organized by offender-level records in tables which we merged to evaluate variation in risk assessment and home plan approval outcomes. The scope of this outcome evaluation was somewhat limited by the time available to complete the project and concerns about using past data to build a predictive algorithm that did not incorporate machine learning or more advanced statistical analyses. We dedicated most of the project to the process evaluation stage, because the observed processes and limited data posed barriers to building an accurate and ethical model to predict future recidivism.

**Findings**

**Risk Assessment**

There has been considerable study of risk assessments for criminal placements and sentencing in the past several decades, especially as states and agencies begin to implement more complex statistical analyses that incorporate risk scores into placement decisions. Most risk assessment tools attempt to accurately predict recidivism using statistical probabilities based on factors like criminal record, education, age, and employment history. These tools vary widely, but they usually consist of questionnaires filled out by a prison staff member, probation officer, psychologist, or other DOC employee. The Pennsylvania corrections system uses the Level of Services Inventory - Revised (LSI-R) assessment developed by D.A. Andrews and James L. Bonta.

The statistical probabilities associated with risk assessment tools like LSI-R are based on the risk principle: the idea that an offender’s risk level should dictate the types of services he or she receives, the dosage needed, and the amount of supervision required to reduce the likelihood or risk of recidivism. Notably, they usually do not predict “time to failure,” or the length of time between release and a recidivism event. States, agencies, departments, and even sub-departments may define recidivism differently based on the time to failure (e.g. 3 or 5 years between release and recidivism) and/or the type of recidivism event (e.g. re-arrest or reincarceration). These definitions thus have profound impacts on the application of risk assessments to the process of placing prisoners at each stage of the referral process.
Decisions regarding an offender’s level of risk are similarly impactful. It is important to note that in the risk assessment context, an offender’s risk score is intended to predict likelihood of recidivism, not how “dangerous” the offender is to others or society. Assigning placements to offenders based on their risk scores is thus a challenging task, since there are concerns regarding treatment needs and the danger of learned deviance in addition to an individual’s own risk of recidivating. Some studies indicate that combining the different risk levels in programming could potentially increase recidivism rates for the lower-risk group.4

Others have found that rehabilitation programs for low-risk offenders with vague behavioral targets were sometimes not effective in reducing recidivism, and that intensive programming and supervision may be appropriate for a high-risk offender but not a low-risk offender.5 When logic models between the intent and practice of treatment programs or punishment decisions are ill-defined, they may be ineffective or even detrimental for the outcomes of low-risk offenders. If programming and services are absent, community restraints (intensive supervision and parole, community residential services, home confinement) tend to be ineffective in reducing recidivism.6 Therefore, risk assessment scores must be considered in the full context of treatment needs, available services, potential mixing of offenders with different risk levels, etc.

Our examination of the LSI-R and interviews with parole officers raised additional concerns. Perhaps most importantly, the LSI-R does not incorporate age in its risk scores, and older age has long been known to be a decent predictor of lower recidivism rates.7 The LSI-R is also used at several different stages of the referral process, and for different purposes. It is administered at various entry and exit points between SCI, CCC, and community to help determine placements and release decisions. This is notable from an evaluation standpoint: if both exit and entry scores are examined in the same statistical test, treatment effects may confound the results. Parole officers also re-administer the LSI-R on a routine basis following an offender’s release from SCI. Furthermore, the LSI-R helps determine allocation of treatment and programming services.

The combination of risk and treatment assessments produces several concerns. First, we wanted to examine whether there was significant variation, on average, in the LSI-R scores over a single offender’s lifetime and between certain offender characteristics. Such variation might indicate
that the LSI-R does not predict recidivism with sufficient accuracy due to discretion and subjectivity within its administration. Second, we evaluated the spread of risk scores across the entire sample of offenders to determine whether the resulting histogram comported with expectations.

There are also qualitative concerns about the LSI-R. With a 54-question assessment, it seems likely that there could be multiple testing error in addition to general discretion in its administration. Moreover, it is not clear that the various static and attitude-based elements in the assessment should be weighted equally. Given variability in parole officers’ caseloads, training, and process fidelity, there will always be some error in their process of characterizing an offender’s attitudes and feelings. An assessment that solely focuses on recidivism risk (excluding treatment needs), includes fewer questions, and is properly weighted may predict recidivism with greater accuracy.

To qualitatively evaluate the LSI-R, we interviewed parole officers about its use, reviewed external and DOC studies, and briefly examined alternative assessment tools like the Service Planning Instrument (see Appendix C). For quantitative evaluation, we used the sample data provided by the DOC to compare risk scores across offender categories, demographics, and outcomes. The main ethnic groups represented in the data were White, Black and Hispanic/Latino.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>36,427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>37,095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>10,127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other race</td>
<td>547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8,067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>76,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Sample</td>
<td>84,196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our main measures included standard deviation score, average risk category, and recidivism score. The standard deviation score measured the variation in LSI-R scores for each offender
over an offender’s life time. It was used to assess the extent to which an individual’s risk assessment can change, hence providing us with insight into potential inconsistencies in assessment and/or changes in recidivism potential with age. An average risk category was assigned to an individual offender based on their average LSI-R score (measured over their lifetime). Finally, the recidivism score was used to measure the number of times an individual offender recidivates. A score of 1 was assigned each time an offender was rearrested, and a score of 2 was assigned each time an offender was reincarcerated. The underlying assumption was that reincarnation was an indication of a more serious offense being committed. This was measured against an individual’s average risk category to assess the accuracy of an LSI-R risk prediction.

![Figure 1](image)

Figure 1 shows that for most individuals LSI-R varies by 3 points over their lifetime; however, for a substantial portion of offenders in the sample, the LSI-R varied by over 5 points. The variation captured here reflects absolute values (increases or decreases in average scores over a lifetime). Risk assessments are dynamic, which may be attributable to changes in an offender’s
attitudes, orientation, education, employment, social supports, and of course age. However, that many offenders experience a change of eight points or more is concerning since this could result in those offenders moving into completely different risk categories (low, medium, and high) along the 54-point continuum. These standard deviation scores indicate that the LSI-R may not be consistently administered and interpreted for multiple assessments of the same offender.

Figure 2

Figure 2 compares average risk categories to an offender’s recidivism score. This shows that the LSI-R in most cases assigned higher-risk categories to offenders who later had higher incidences of recidivism. However, there is very little difference in the frequency of recidivism between
offenders designated as high and low risk. This could potentially indicate that the LSI-R is not a discerning tool which can be reliably used to distinguish between high and low risk offenders.

We further explored how the LSI-R performs on predicting recidivism for different demographic groups.

Figure 3 shows that the LSI-R does not predict recidivism differently for most of the racial groups. It is notable that there is not very much variation between predictions for medium and high risk offenders. The same is true between low and medium risk offenders in the gender breakdown shown in Figure 4. This could be due to the way the assessment is conducted by
parole officers, or the way the questions are structured which lead women to answer them in a certain way.

Finally, Figure 5 simply explores the relationship between LSI-R scores and offender age, and it shows that there is no clear relationship between the two. This contradicts repeatedly conducted research that has found age to be a significant predictor of crime.

![Figure 5](image)

The measures used in our analysis provide insight into the potential relationship that could exist between LSI-R and actual recidivism, but they are limited in scope. Further studies may need to be conducted to confirm our findings. The recidivism score simply takes into account the frequency of recidivism events, and while reincarcerations are weighed more heavily, it does not distinguish between the severity of recidivism events.


**Communication**

Our process evaluation uncovered a series of potential gaps in the communication strategies for both DOC and PBPP. These findings are preliminary and merit additional assessment, as we discuss in the Future Research section.

First, the DOC and Parole Board both have oversight and responsibilities related to the complex system of offender allocations and placements in SCI, CCC, and community settings. However, it is not clear that the two agencies communicate using the same terms, definitions, methods, and timelines. For example, DOC and PBPP use different definitions of recidivism, which means that the status and risk level of an offender may not be accurately communicated and interpreted across departments. Second, the Parole Board has ultimate decision-making power over placements in centers that are administered by the Bureau of Community Corrections. Our document review raised some questions about the strength of communication strategies across departments and agencies at every point of the referral process (see Appendix D).

Interviews with CCC staff members, BCC administrators, and parole officers also revealed communication barriers between Harrisburg and the field. Parole officers often need to quickly integrate new processes on a quick learning curve, and rarely have input in the design of such processes. There is also limited ongoing communication to support the implementation of new initiatives, procedures, and technologies in halfway house and community settings. Anecdotal evidence from interviews suggests that these limitations might be damaging to parole officers’ morale, which in turn could affect their risk assessments and home plan approvals.

**Placement**

The University of Cincinnati report and internal studies show that offender placement and services received had effects on an offender’s probability of recidivating. Since placement is an essential part of the system and an offender’s success, we thoroughly researched the process for offender placement. Through our document review and speaking with staff members of the DOC and PBPP, we noted that the primary reasons for going through a halfway house include: (1) the absence of essential resources in the community, (2) an offender’s lack of financial or familial resources to support the approval of a home plan, and (3) the severity of their treatment needs.
Sex offenders, for example, will have a harder time finding resources or having their home plan approved because of restrictions placed on their living arrangement. Certain offender categories will have more difficulty obtaining a home plan, and might automatically be sent to live in a halfway house. However, this might not relate to severity of treatment needs. In contrast to our initial assumption that residential services might be superior to non-residential services, the quality and availability of non-residential services received high praise in our interviews with CCC staff members and parole officers in Allegheny County.

Any system that is predicated on the decision-making of people will have some discretion in its process. In interviews with DOC and PBPP staff members in both Harrisburg and Pittsburgh, it was reiterated many times that placement recommendations can be heavily influenced by the discretion of personnel who may place an offender based on convenience, proximity, or other reasons that deviate from set guidelines. Some degree of discretion is needed in this type of environment, but it is not clear whether discretion is currently being exercised with the intention of effectively using DOC resources and preventing future recidivism.

Placement can vary across Pennsylvania, as the state has urban and rural areas that offer different services depending on location. Through anecdotal evidence and statistical research, we learned that the cost and availability of housing varies widely by county, municipality, and even Census block groups. Using 2010 Census data, we mapped out the vacancy rate and average monthly
rent across the state of Pennsylvania. The two maps in Figure 6 show this variation, which is likely based on a large set of structural features such as employment rates, housing demand, cost of living, proximity to resources, etc. This variation directly impacts the home plan approval process; for example, anecdotal evidence suggests that it is more difficult to initiate home plans in the Pittsburgh region, whereas they have a higher rejection rate in the Philadelphia region.⁹

Figure 7 shows the top ten cities that get the highest amount of home plan requests. Unsurprisingly, Philadelphia received many more requests than any other city. Figure 8 shows the home plan rejection rate for these cities. It is rather alarming that all ten cities have a rejection rate over 90%. These rates merit further investigation, since they might be tied to process inefficiencies rather than structural barriers.

**Receiving AOD Treatment**

Figure 9
Finally, Figures 9, 10, and 11 demonstrate an unsurprising but discouraging trend: offenders receiving alcohol, drug, medical, or mental health treatments receive home plan rejections at very high rates. Additional support in securing a home plan might help remediate some of the barriers facing these categories of offenders. It may also be worthwhile to initiate the home plan search process with these offenders sooner than the standard 4-5 months from minimum.

**Recommendations**

(1) **Merge DOC and PBPP**

Our analysis suggests the merger of the Department of Corrections and the Probation and Parole would benefit the system in multiple ways. First, a merger would improve communication through all parts of the referral process. By creating a singular institutional entity, communication throughout the referral process would operate from a common language, culture, terminology, and method of information flow. This uniformity supports more efficient and productive communication while reducing instances of miscommunication.

Second, a merger would generate a singular definition for recidivism, which currently does not exist. By operating from multiple definitions for a single concept, the institution creates unnecessary opportunities for personnel error since it is unclear which definition of recidivism is in operation at any given time. A singular definition of recidivism could make personnel better equipped to perform work functions surrounding data entry, internal and external communication, and planning. Moreover, a uniform definition would strengthen future research and program evaluation related to recidivism.
Third, the merger could also provide better stewardship by generating system-wide cost savings. These savings will largely come from the streamlining of various operating systems and processes. According to the Office of the Governor, a merger of the Department of Corrections and Probation and Parole would generate $10 million in immediate savings. Additionally, the state of New York estimated cost savings of $17 million in FY 2011-12 after a similar merger.

Fourth, a unified accountability structure would promote process fidelity system-wide by holding all personnel (DOC and Probation and Parole) accountable to the same expectations, standards, and measures. However, it would be important for the merger to retain the essential independence of the Probation and Parole Board in the process of making freedom decisions in order to ensure public safety and reduce possible impacts of outside pressures related to budgetary concerns.

(2) Evaluate Communication Strategy

Our analysis indicates an immediate evaluation of the current communication strategy should be conducted to improve information flows throughout the system. Such an evaluation should outline and define the current communication streams, systems, and structures across all organizational charts. It should also determine the necessary procedures to communicate top-down policies (Harrisburg to the field) through consistent timelines, personnel, and methods. Consistency would support more effective communication and reduce the spread of misinformation.

It is equally important to develop methods and opportunities for field representatives to provide feedback about potential policies before and after implementation. Before policies are implemented, a panel of field representatives should vet assumptions and conclusions. At a minimum, this increased representative diversity should include parole officers from several different localities and officer types (e.g. sex offender, general, high risk, etc.) to provide diverse perspectives for optimal decision-making. DOC and PBPP leadership should also create new anonymous feedback channels from the field to Harrisburg to ensure system-wide policies are generated with all available information sourced from various system levels. Another way to
facilitate this information exchange is to require that management-level administrators visit different field offices on a regular basis to observe and better understand field operations.

Finally, it is critical that DOC and PBPP develop strategies to demonstrate genuine appreciation for parole officers to support higher morale among personnel who perform an incredibly difficult job. One of the parole officers we interviewed mentioned that even a small gesture of appreciation would be very well-received and could help prevent feelings of burnout.

**(3) Evaluate Risk Assessment Strategy**

Our analysis indicates the LSI-R needs to be evaluated further due to inherent deficits surrounding assessment power, cost, interrelated reliability, and conceptual incongruence. The LSI-R lacks full assessment power since it fails to account for critical predictors of recidivism such as age.

Additionally, the LSI-R is cost inefficient in two critical ways. First, the LSI-R costs $1.50 per administration, costing the system thousands of dollars each year. Second, by not reliably predicting the probability an offender will recidivate, offenders will either receive more supervision than needed (unnecessarily cost intensive) or receive too little supervision, which could increase their likelihood of recidivating. The costs associated with recidivism, including incarceration and extended supervision, are very high.

Parole officers’ opinions, perspectives, and experiences should be incorporated in a fully robust evaluation of the LSI-R. This input is critical since parole officers administer the LSI-R frequently. It is also important to ask parole officers to what extent they factor the offender’s attitudes and orientation into the assessment, as this can greatly affect the assessment’s reliability and validity.

Finally, evaluators need to determine the assessment’s ability to measure both the likelihood of recidivism and necessary treatment services. Since these are disparate measures, evaluators should perform outside assessments (one focused on recidivism and one focused on determining...
needed offender services) to compare measurement and outcome characteristics of the assessments as validity and reliability calibrations.

(4) Improve Home Plan Approval Process
Our evaluation indicates the goals of reducing system-wide costs and recidivism can be better supported by improving the home plan approval process. System administrators should have the goals of avoiding unnecessary placement of offenders directly from SCI. The reduction of inappropriate or unnecessary assignments can help reduce bed count and/or length of stay in CCCs by approving home plans before release from prison or expediting home plan approval. Both methods would cut down BCC costs, especially if utilized in conjunction.

To optimize offender placements in halfway houses, evaluators need to identify variations across the state of Pennsylvania associated with the home plan approval process to find opportunities for improvement. Through this analysis, evaluators should note areas with inordinately high home plan denial rates and identify locally tailored strategies to increase approval rates. It would be beneficial to convene the BCC regional directors to discuss specific problems preventing home plan approvals associated with the highlighted geographic variation. To further support the home plan process, evaluators should determine modal reasons for home plan rejections to eliminate significant barriers to approval. This can help evaluators identify low-hanging fruit and possibly propose a training intervention with those responsible for approving home plans.

Finally, system administrators can increase supports for home plan approval and cost reductions by increasing funding to the offender housing program. Through covering the rent for more offenders over a six- to twelve-month duration, administrators could help remove the financial barrier to home plan approval. It would also reduce BCC budgetary expenditure -- housing an offender in a halfway house costs approximately $3,000 while monthly rent for a one bedroom apartment rarely exceeds $1,000 in Pennsylvania.\(^\text{13}\)

(5) Ensure Future Evaluation Designs are Robust and Objective
Since our process analysis revealed several areas that merit future evaluation such as communication, risk assessments, and home plan approvals, it is critical that evaluation designs
are robust and objective. Most importantly, subsequent evaluations and research should confirm evaluation designs are context-sensitive to avoid inaccurate outcome measurements due to generalizations about structural inequality and other barriers. Within a context-sensitive design, evaluators should be aware of reverse causality, omitted variable bias, family-wise error rates, confounding treatment effects, multiple testing error, selection bias, etc. In accounting for these evaluation elements, evaluators and researchers should conduct experiments when possible rather than using past data from processes that may themselves be prone to error or inappropriate levels of discretion. Potentially flawed processes could contain fallacious data connected with a lack of communication, ineffectively managed parole officer discretion, or inaccurate risk assessments.

In addition, all evaluators should clearly state assumptions and regularly revisit them. Evaluators should regularly check for consistency in the data entry, definitions, and processes to support validity, reliability, and precision of measurements. Further, the criteria of measurements (risk assessments, treatment needs, evaluation metrics, etc.) should be well-defined and consistently followed for strong process fidelity. It would be worthwhile to convene panels of stakeholders to vet all the above characteristics of an evaluation’s design as well as the evaluation targets (e.g. home plans, LSI-R, non-residential service quality). These precautions will help ensure that evaluation results reflect the situation on the ground and can lay the groundwork for better sensitivity analysis.

**Future Research**

1. **Examine Home Plan Variation**

Further research should be focused on assessing home plan variation across offender categories and geographic location. By studying home plan rejection rate variation across offender type (e.g. sex offender, violent offender, etc.) and offender risk level (e.g. low, medium, high), researchers can identify offender types and risk categories with inordinately high home plan rejection rates. From the resulting analysis, administrators might be able to allocate additional resources to support offender categories with higher-than-expected denial rates. Evaluators should also examine geographic variation in home plan rejection. In addition to structural
barriers that vary by locality, it is important to assess whether different parole offices approach the home plan approval process differently. Such differences could worsen approval rates due to consideration of factors that are not included elsewhere in the Commonwealth. On the other hand, locally-tailored approaches to home plan approvals could reveal practices that should be replicated in other parole offices across the state.

(2) Evaluate Impact of Halfway House Stay on Recidivism

Further research should be conducted on the impact of halfway house stay on recidivism, including both number of stays and duration. Such research should conduct experiments in specific localities to build from the University of Cincinnati evaluation and internal studies previously conducted on this topic. Within this experiment, researchers should examine disaggregated recidivism outcomes for offenders with like characteristics, risk scores, and treatments as they relate to placement in community correction centers. An experiment would be a better research method than statistical analysis of past data, since the data has limitations related to process fidelity and cannot predict the missing counterfactual as accurately as an experiment could.

In addition to an experimental assessment, researchers should perform program evaluation on offender services. Future program evaluation of delivered services should focus on the following:

- To what extent do these services cover the full range of criminogenic needs?
- Are delivered services effective regarding outcomes? Are services cost-effective?
- To what extent might non-residential services constitute adequate substitutes to residential treatments in CCCs?
- What are the best practices of existing BCC service provision?
- Which offender categories might benefit from increased service utilization?

(3) Assess Variation in Parole Officers’ Risk Scores

Future research should focus on determining methods to strengthen interrelated reliability by reducing variation in risk scores among assessment administrators. Before conducting this research, current data collection standards should be examined to determine the extent to which
assessments can be performed with the necessary validity. Once the existence of quality data is confirmed, researchers should analyze parole officer-level data to identify possibly significant levels of risk score variation between parole officers for otherwise similar offenders. Trend analysis can also be used to determine if parole officer assessments vary in the aggregate across regions, counties, and/or parole offices across the Commonwealth. Interviewing corrections administrators in other states could help DOC and PBPP determine whether different training for parole officers could also help reduce the variation in risk assessments. However, it is important to remember that some variation may be expected due to structural differences across regions.

Additionally, future research should assess to what extent process fidelity and discretion create variation within risk assessment administration. Such research should determine the role and contribution of parole officer discretion in assessment administration variation. Parole officers’ morale, especially over an entire career, might also contribute to inefficacious exercise of discretion within the administration of risk assessments. Also, it would help to know how genuine displays of positive affirmation from superiors and intentional variation in caseloads (by type and size) might counteract the effects of burnout and low morale.14

(4) Evaluate Organizational Design
Future research should focus on ways of improving the system’s organizational design to better support its overall functions, especially those that might affect recidivism outcomes. First, evaluators should identify possible organizational challenges that could be addressed through a DOC and PBPP merger. Second, they should assess the effectiveness of current communication channels to disseminate information across departments and sub-departments. This communication assessment should analyze the effectiveness of communication modes and frequencies across departments and sub-departments. Furthermore, assessments should consider the possible creation of anonymous, bottom-up communication loops from the field to Harrisburg.

(5) Assess System Capacity
Future research should assess the system’s capacity in relation to performing its functions, particularly those associated with reducing recidivism. It would be pertinent to conduct a cost-
benefit analysis of halfway house bed reduction to determine whether it would yield a larger net benefit to shut down a small number of facilities or reducing bed counts in many facilities. This analysis should compare the benefits of bed reduction to the feasibility of simply reducing duration of stay, which would complement evaluations about methods to improve the home plan approval process.

Additional system capacity analysis should focus on service capacities across the Commonwealth. Specifically, this analysis should identify service gaps as part of a broader service provision and utilization assessment to determine the extent to which existing non-residential service supply is capable of absorbing demand. Research efforts should also focus on assessing how the expansion or reduction of beds would affect residential service quality and the ratios of CCC staff to residents.

**Conclusion**

From our evaluation of the community corrections system, several action steps emerged that could improve system efficacy and potentially improve offender outcomes related to recidivism. The main action steps can be summarized as follows:

- Merge DOC and PBPP
- Evaluate communication channels to ensure process fidelity
- Solicit feedback from field staff
- Mandate that manager-level personnel visit the field regularly
- Consider implementing a simpler risk assessment tool
- Assess areas of discretion within risk assessment administration
- Examine and improve home plan approval process
- Assess variation in home plan approval by parole office and region
- Perform program evaluation for existing residential services
- Assess availability of non-residential services to remediate bed reduction in halfway houses
- Ensure future evaluation designs are robust and objective
- Conduct experiments to analyze the impact of halfway house stay on recidivism
● Evaluate organizational design pre- and post-merger
● Identify institutional weaknesses and assess system capacity

Many of these items represent opportunities for future research, some of which could involve outside consultants or other Heinz College teams. By further evaluating the roles of risk assessment, placement, and communication in recidivism outcomes, the PA Department of Corrections and Board of Probation and Parole can better promote community safety and reduce the incidence of recidivism.
Appendices

Appendix A: Experts Consulted

Bret Bucklen, Director of Bureau of Research, Planning and Statistics
Nicolette Bell, Chief, Research and Evaluation, Bureau of Research, Planning & Statistics
Daniel McIntyre, Deputy Director of BCC
Luis Resto, Deputy Director of BCC
Patty Sheaffer, Policy and Planning Section Chief, BCC
Morris Richardson, Regional Director, BCC Region 3
Rich Podguski, Director of the Bureau of Reentry Coordination
Christian Stephens, Deputy Executive Director, Office of Probation & Parole Field Supervision
Brian Helfrich, District Director of PBPP
Parole officers in Pittsburgh (134 Enterprise St. office)
Daniel Nagin, Teresa & H. John Heinz III University Professor of Public Policy & Statistics
Jonathan Caulkins, H. Guyford Stever University Professor of Operations Research and Public Policy
Karyn Moore, Associate Teaching Professor of Information Systems
Dave Lassman, Distinguished Service Professor of Organizational Management
Appendix B: Program Evaluation

Since current recidivism rates and expenditures suggest the system is in need of repair, we approached this project using program evaluation. A detailed program evaluation encompasses the following stages:

1. Context evaluation
2. Needs assessment
3. Program theory evaluation
4. Process evaluation
5. Outcome evaluation
6. Cost-benefit analysis

The results of our context and outcome evaluations are included in the body of the report. Due to timeframe and scope limitations, we did not conduct cost-benefit analysis. Needs assessment, program theory evaluation, and process evaluation methodologies are detailed below.

Needs Assessment

Due to the scope and nature of the project, we did not conduct a formal needs assessment. We reviewed the Re-entry Services Needs Assessments (ReSNA) documents, which we considered in our final recommendations. There are several existing assumptions about the needs of the target population through the very processes of arrest and incarceration in a corrections system. In practice, the “needs” of the target population are determined by the corrections system itself -- if Person A engages in Act B, which the legal system has designated as a crime, Person A may be arrested, tried, convicted, and/or incarcerated. Thus, Person A becomes a member of the target population and is deemed to be in need of “correction.” This institutional environment is helpful in narrowing our focus to a target population of existing offenders that is predefined by legal statutes.

However, several elements of a formal needs assessment are still relevant to this project. First, it is important to consider whether the needs of various subpopulations are continuous or intermittent. For example, a sex offender with mental health treatment needs may benefit from more continuous and frequent contact with the corrections system to prevent future recidivism than a non-sex offender. Second, specific needs vary among the diverse members of the target
population of offenders. It is therefore useful to examine whether these needs are severe enough to warrant programmatic intervention, and if such needs can even be defined. Risk assessment tools can help define these needs in terms such as substance abuse, mental health, sex offense, etc. An outcome evaluation can then assess whether the residential and non-residential services offered through the corrections system help meet these needs and reduce the likelihood of recidivism. We assumed that the various needs implicit in the LSI-R constitute a preliminary list for our outcome evaluation.

Typical needs assessments also make distinctions between populations in need and populations in demand. The mandatory nature of certain programs both before and after release is also linked to an assumption that we most care about the population at risk of recidivating, since we also assume that there is no population in demand (no person would want to recidivate). Another key assumption is that any parolee has some risk of recidivating. One element of a traditional needs assessment that we carried into our outcome evaluation is demographic disaggregation of these recidivism risk levels. Because the size of the population is known and the need for a corrections system is a given, we applied traditional needs assessment questions to other parts of our evaluation.

In summary, there is a presumed need for correction with regard to the target population of offenders, and this project will likely not alter that reality through formative or summative evaluation. However, subpopulations’ needs related to halfway house occupancy (versus direct placement in community) will be examined in our process and outcome evaluations.

**Program Theory**

Program theory evaluation is a prerequisite for accurate process and outcome evaluation stages. The process evaluation stage requires us to determine whether the service provision and service utilization are working as intended. Because evaluation of the process stage depends on a thorough examination of the operationalized measures of service utilization and service provision, the related program theory must provide the foundation for meaningful measurement of these areas. Finally, evaluation of the program’s impact is erroneous if we don’t first identify the intended impact of the program.
The evaluation relies on the assumption that the primary intentions of any program administered by PADOC or PBPP are to reduce recidivism and promote community safety. However, both agencies should critically assess whether these intentions hold true for every program and employee involved in every institutional process. With that critical assumption in mind, we sought to answer the following evaluation questions:

1. How do administrators and employees of halfway houses intend to reduce recidivism?
2. How do halfway houses intend to promote community safety, if at all? Does this intention vary by subpopulations of offenders?
3. How do PADOC employees, contractors, and parole officers intend to address differing levels of resistance among offenders on probation and parole?
4. What are the goals for communication type and frequency with offenders? Are these goals based on known best practices, or derived for cost-effectiveness/convenience?

Assuming all interviewees can answer these questions honestly and with sufficient background knowledge, they are measurable. The first two are meaningful because they can be used to construct a logic model to test alignment between the stated goals of the corrections system and the processes institutional actors follow to reach those goals. For instance, if a certain procedure within a home plan referral process (1) does not improve the likelihood or efficacy of referral, (2) cannot be shown to reduce recidivism outcomes, and (3) cannot be shown to improve community safety by preventing future crimes, it might be worthwhile to consider eliminating that procedure.

Question 3 is important because we should aim to evaluate whether PBPP and DOC employees operate with an appropriate amount of discretion to deal with varying levels of resistance. For example, the absence of standards that are understood and consistently followed could point to increased potential for recidivism events in the future. Similarly, Question 4 will allow us to critically consider each point of contact with offenders in the referral process and whether the type and level of communication is necessary/sufficient. Additionally, we might be able to recommend streamlining of process components if we find them to be costly and/or not appropriately linked to intended outcomes.
Because we can delve deeply into the answers for each of these questions in our process evaluation, our primary method of acquiring preliminary answers was interviewing key informants. Interviewees included:

- Bret Bucklen, Director of Bureau of Research, Planning and Statistics
- Nicolette Bell, Chief, Research and Evaluation, Bureau of Research, Planning and Statistics
- Daniel McIntyre, Deputy Director of BCC
- Luis Resto, Deputy Director of BCC
- Patty Sheaffer, Policy and Planning Section Chief, BCC
- Morris Richardson, Regional Director, BCC Region 3
- Rich Poguski, Director of the Bureau of Reentry Coordination
- Parole officers in Pittsburgh (134 Enterprise St. office)
- Staff members at Renewal in downtown Pittsburgh

From our interviews, we deduced that halfway house administrators intend to reduce recidivism and promote community safety through effective provision of services. Since service utilization is often mandatory for parolees and reentrants, we will closely examine the provision side in our process evaluation. The interviews did not yield completely clear answers for the third and fourth questions. From our understanding, the entire corrections system is undergoing many administrative changes. It also involves infinite complexities due to the participation of various institutional actors and the enactment of changing policies and procedures. These challenges indicate potential weaknesses in the logic models for the implementation of communication strategies and risk assessments, which we will evaluate further in the process and outcome evaluations.

**Process Evaluation**

The process evaluation phase informs all the other three stages of evaluation in order to provide a complete understanding of the overall system. Specifically, the process evaluation assesses the implementation fidelity of the theory evaluation. To this end, we conducted a multidisciplinary evaluation of the Pennsylvania community corrections processes through a program data and document reviews along with key informant interviews. These process evaluation methodologies
were used to evaluate processes associated with communication, assessment, placements, and systems capacities.

The needs assessment phase established the nature and extent (i.e. prevalence and incidence) of offender needs associated with refraining from recidivistic behaviors. Based on the needs assessment, the program theory proposes desired program provision, utilization, and outcome design to address offender needs. The process evaluation phase will answer the extent to which the service provision and service utilization comported with the program theory by assessing areas related to offender needs, services, and home plan provision.

We conducted this process evaluation during a time of process transitioning within the community corrections and parole agencies between January and May 2017. This evaluation uses program service provision and utilization to determine the extent to which it is feasible for offenders within the offender population to receive all needed services, programming, and provisions such as housing. Through assessing provisions and services, system administrators will be directly informed of the extent to which the community corrections and parole departments have provided acceptable and reasonable access levels of associated services and functions to the target population of offenders. If these departments provide too little access (internally or externally) to offenders, this can point to unnecessary non-utilization or non-provision issues, which could warrant action by community corrections or parole administration.

According to the program theory, there need to be processes, systems, and practices that supports the reduction of recidivistic behavior among offenders. To this end, if the community corrections and parole system has not installed the required processes, systems, and practices to support successful outcomes, program administration needs to identify and remediate associated barriers. Identifying existing barriers would allow community corrections and parole administration to adjust the system characteristics and/or dynamics to better reduce recidivistic behaviors, or reallocate budgeted resources to strengthen compliance.

We reviewed documents associated with multiple aspects of the community corrections system, including general process, homeplan, assessment, and community corrections contract materials.
These documents provided a conceptual understanding of the processes, systems, and functions of the community correctional system in order to ask key informants critical questions and bring up possible concerns to gain more information regarding implementation fidelity. Additionally, these questions and concerns were posed to challenge thinking, dispel possible bias, or affirm assumptions we might be operating under within our evaluation.

Based on the document review, we identified the critical inflows and outflows between SCIs, CCCs, and community. Residential placements generally fall into the following categories: (1) parolees released from SCI that need community corrections placement, (2) State Intermediate Punishment offenders supervised by DOC on a two-year flat sentence, and (3) parolees in the community who are in danger of violating parole stipulations (halfway backs). Because SIP constitutes a relatively small population, the team primarily examined the flows of SCI releases and halfway backs. Residential placement for parolees could depend on conditional release, severe treatment needs, or inability to secure a home plan. We pursued further process and outcome evaluation related to home plans since it seemed possible that there could be discretion within the home plan approval process.

In conducting the document review, we began assessing the community corrections facility contracts to define the universe of services, provisions, and functions provided within a given halfway house. With more time, we also would have assessed the structural feasibility of providing all contracted items within the associated structures of a halfway house given the known needs, characteristics, and behaviors of an offender population. Within the document review process, we formulated a list of questions and concerns regarding the ways contracting of services, provisions, and functions operated in practice. The following is a non-exhaustive sample of these process oriented questions:

- What is the proportion of offenders who receive all services referred to by the offender’s case agent?
- To what extent is housing affordability a limiting factor for offenders who need to secure home plans in various localities?
- What are the staffing ratios within each halfway house?
● What proportion of the services outlined in the contractor’s facilities contract are being provided? If provided, are said services being provided in the quantities determined by the contract?

In furthering the document review, we evaluated home plan documents to assess implementation fidelity of home plan approval. This review focused on understanding the processes, requirements, and challenges associated with home plan approval. Specifically, we assessed the home plan investigation checklist, the home plan approval system maps, and the LSI-R risk assessment. The information gathered from this assessment was then used to formulate questions focusing on implementation fidelity when interviewing key informants to expand our knowledge breadth and depth of process fidelity associated with home plan approval.

Subsequent to the home plan approval review, we focused on evaluating the LSI-R assessment and its possible implications within all aspects of community corrections and parole systems. Specifically, we sought to identify effects associated with the assessment’s interrelated reliability and validity. Given the significance of the LSI-R score in determining supervision levels, services, and placement system-wide, we posed many questions to key informants in order to better assess the implementation fidelity of the LSI-R.

The document review methodology contains strengths and limitations. Document reviews allow evaluators to easily assess available archived documents that speak to the original intent of the associated process being evaluated. Additionally, document reviews strongly support evaluators’ ability to cross-reference information and identify potential information gaps, biases, or areas needing further analysis. Conversely, the universe of information that can be gathered from a document review is constrained to the bounds of available archived system documents. Further, the authors of the archived documents might not still be employed within the system, so inherent biases, assumptions, and information accounted for in the creation of the document cannot be fully assessed.

The theoretical understanding and formulated questions from the document review served as a starting point for interviews with key informants across the community corrections and parole
systems. In addition to asking pre-constructed questions, we allowed interviews to organically unfold in order to gather salient information from experts within the system. To support this organic process we used open-ended questions, active listening, and motivational interviewing techniques to elicit relevant information. We were able to correct for possible biases and informational mismatch by cross-referencing gathered information from the multiple evaluation methods used.

The key informant interviews methodology contains strengths and limitations. Key informant interviews allow evaluators to gather a higher quantity of richer more salient information, since key informants are directly involved in the program and are often content experts. Additionally, key informants can refer evaluators to previous unrealized sources of needed information. However, key informants are prone to biases and provide information that is rooted in their personal perspectives. There is also the danger that informants might hide information, mislead, or engage in other informational distortions depending on their opinion of the evaluation and/or evaluator.
Appendix C: SPin Evaluation

The following is a list of areas, characteristics, and elements where the SPin assessment might be superior to the LSI-R assessment. The Service Planning Instrument (SPin):

- Moves away from unproductive discretion-based components to a more structured and methodical planning assessment.
- Incorporates the proven practice techniques prescribed within motivational interviewing.
- Maps offender needs, characteristics, social supports, and skills. Ideally, this is focused on a strengths-based perspective that leverages the offender’s individual strengths. By focusing on and leveraging strengths, the offender is more likely to be motivated and feel they are capable of making the desired change. This is in contrast to the deficit model, which has been historically used in various professions. The deficit model focuses on the offender’s real or perceived deficits and challenges particularly relating to historic behavior, character flaws, etc. Many times when the deficit model is in effect, offenders feel ashamed, demoralized, and incapable of making the needed changes.
- Moves toward a culturally competent practice to understand the unique characteristics, realities, and experiences of each individual offender to more productively work with each individual offender. All of these practices are used to build a pro-social relationship with the offender. By building such a relationship, the offender is more inclined to be open to, accept, and act on the pro-social behavioral definitions communicated by the caseworker. This is in line with Social Learning Theory, ecologically-based practice, and labeling theory.
- Focuses on building the necessary social support structures the offender will need to be successful in making the change to engaging in non-recidivistic behavior, coming from the idea that no one is an island and everyone needs support to be successful.
- Highlights the importance of progress monitoring case and offender needs, as such a process is highly fluid. This progress monitoring allows the caseworker to quickly adapt to the offender's changing realities and provide the necessary supports to accommodate those dynamics. The progress monitoring of cases increases the probability the offender will be successful by having the caseworker practice more proactively instead of reactively to the casework process.
• Leverages the benefits of casework planning customization as a means of tailoring planning and systems of support and services to the uniqueness of the individual offender, which better supports them in manifesting a successful outcome. This moves away from the one-size-fits-all model which is much less effective.

• Through supporting a more collaborative casework practice model, SPiN reduces the likelihood of conflict between offender and caseworker. The reduction of interpersonal conflict better supports pro-social relationship building and reduces stress on caseworkers and possible professional burnout.
Appendix D: Communication in Referral Process

During the process evaluation, we reviewed maps of the current referral processes as well as the proposed changes. This evaluation resulted in the following questions:

General Questions

- What outside communication is the reentrant permitted before submitting a home plan?
- What assistance is the reentrant granted if they do not have family members or friends to help devise a home plan and/or job placement?
- The website says that a home plan may be denied if the Provider does not admit that the offender was involved in wrongdoing. How does the parole agent evaluate this?
- Is the categorical breakdown of home plan rejection frequency evaluated? How often? By whom?
- How does BCC make decisions regarding tradeoffs of assigning someone to a center close to home versus one with better services?

CCC/CCF Pre-Screening Home Plan Checklist

- Does “history of domestic violence” include police reports, or must charges have been filed?
- What qualifies as weapon? Do parole officers or other examining agents have discretion in determining this?
- What are the communication channels between parole officers and BCC regarding changes to home plan approval status, such as the required removal of a large animal?

SCI to CCC

- To what extent does DOC account for system capacity within the referral process? How is this communicated between PBPP field staff, CCC staff, and BCC administrators?
- After CCPM reviews and submits packet in 2-5 business days to BCC Resource Account:
  - How many packets does the CCPM receive in a typical day?
  - What is the variation?
  - Are there institutional supports for the CCPM if caseload exceeds its usual amount, and how is this communicated?
● After bed date is assigned within 7 business days with a two week placement date (unless the offender is “hard to place [HTP]”):
  ○ What are the institutional consequences if the 7 day range is not met?
  ○ Are parameters for HTP designation clearly communicated and consistently used?
    Which staff members are involved in making that determination, and how is it communicated?

SCI to Home Plan
● What type of security concerns could override offender being notified about the reasoning for rejection of home plan? Are the same personnel always responsible for making these decisions? Do they communicate their reasoning, and if so, to whom and on what timeline?
● What can fall under “just cause” for extensions on field agents conducting and submitting investigations with recommendation of approval or denial?
● After a home plan is denied a second time and supervisor sends to District Director or Designee for review, is there a process in place to revisit the case for approval or denial?
● If still denied, District Office notifies institutional parole staff that they inform inmate and start working on another home plan. What is done differently on the second iteration to ensure a successful home plan?

CCC to Home Plan
● Under Option 1 on the proposed changes, counselor reviews home plan and completes checklist and emails to Field Agent/Supervisor/CD or CFC. Is the email sent to all these personnel, some, or a mix? Evaluate which communication channels are critical and/or optimal.
● In the proposed changes, there is the following addition to “Field Clerical/supervisor assigns within 2 business days to field agent to investigate:”
  ○ “If assigned to supervisor instead, then they have two business days to assign to agent.”
  ○ Why would it be assigned to a supervisor instead? What is the communication process for this decision?
If denied the first time, supervisor sends to District Director or Designee for review; if still denied and sex offender, review goes to PBPP regional director for final decision, this is then relayed to staff. If denied again, Center Agent is notified and meets with reentrant to inform them start process again for now home plan approval.

- Does the decision being relayed to staff lead to possible approval? How so?
- How might communication between personnel be optimized to increase approval rates?

**Community to SCI and CCC to SCI**

- Referral units communicate only with the parole agent, not re-entrants. Where does this factor into the process as it is outlined?

- Sometimes referral units will have video conferences for complicated cases, especially those involving medical information, to make sure the receiving facility has the capacity to deal with the person and knows which processes to follow upon their placement.
  - Who determines the personnel involved in these video conferences? How is the needed level of expertise determined regarding medical information?
  - How are they scheduled?
  - How is confidential information communicated?

- Is the Form 348 (notification of violation) sent to the offender before or after the case conference? Is this done consistently?
  - If the offender has questions, what are the communication protocol for providing feedback?

- For graduated sanctioning, which parties and agencies are involved in officially rubber-stamping the decision?
  - Are there timeline expectations?
  - To ensure fidelity, it might be worthwhile to compare the recommended sanction to the imposed sanction.
Endnotes

6 Ibid.
9 Interview with Morris Richardson during halfway house visits
12 Interview with Bret Bucklen during weekly project meeting
13 Interview with Morris Richardson during halfway house visits
14 Interview with parole officers during parole office visit in Pittsburgh
15 Team member Aaron Saeugling has a Master of Social Work degree and worked for seven years in community-based social work.