



# Surveying the Field

*State-Level Findings from the  
2008 Parole Practices Survey*

Jesse Jannetta  
Aaron Horvath  
August 2011



THE URBAN INSTITUTE  
Justice Policy Center





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### **Pew Center on the States**

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# Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	v
<b>ABOUT THE AUTHORS</b>	vii
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	1
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	4
The Parole Practices Survey	5
Key Findings	9
A Note on Interpretation	10
<b>PAROLE SUPERVISION PRACTICES IN THE STATES</b>	12
Finding 1. Widespread Reported Use of Evidence-Based Practices and Many Effective Parole Supervision Practices	12
Assessing Risk and Need	16
Supervision Conditions and Activities	17
Structured Response to Violations	17
Finding 2. Significant Uncertainty Regarding Evidence-Based Practices	20
Finding 3. Many Parole Field Offices Do Not Know Whether Parolee Recidivism Is Being Tracked	21
Finding 4. Approaches to Enhance Parolee Motivation and Engage Pro-social Supports Are Uncommon	21
<b>STATE PROFILES</b>	27
South Dakota: Committing to Continuous Improvement	28
Tennessee: Moving Rapidly to Improve Practice	29
Arkansas: Institutionalizing Parole Practice through Policy Change	31

## CONTENTS

<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>APPENDIX A. PAROLE PRACTICE SURVEY RESULTS BY STATE</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>FIGURES</b>	
Figure 1. Aggregate Parole Practice Scores	16
Figure 2. Conditions of Parole Tailored for Individual Parolees	18
Figure 3. Office Uses Sanctioning Grid or Guidelines	19
Figure 4. Parolees Play a Role in Setting Supervision Goals and Use of Motivational Interviewing	24
Figure 5. Parole Officers Involve Pro-social Supports in Supervision	26
<b>TABLES</b>	
Table 1. Survey Responses and Parole Populations	7
Table 2. Office Employs Evidence-Based Practices	13
Table 3. Office Tracks Recidivism of Current and Former Parolees	22
<b>BOXES</b>	
Box 1. 13 Parole Supervision Strategies to Enhance Reentry Outcomes	6
Box 2. Aggregate Practice Score Calculation	14



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# Executive Summary

**P**arole supervision is the key mechanism facilitating the return of prisoners to the community. There are over 500,000 releases from prison to supervision each year (West, Sabol, and Greenman 2010), and research has identified strategies that are effective at reducing the chances that offenders will revert to a life of crime and drugs. In this report, the authors examine reported prevalence of use of these strategies, called evidence-based practices (EBPs), in general, as well as specific evidence-based and promising practices as outlined in *Putting Public Safety First: 13 Parole Supervision Strategies to Enhance Reentry Outcomes* (Solomon et al. 2008).

In 2008, the Urban Institute conducted a survey on the use of EBPs and published national-level data in *An Evolving Field: Findings from the 2008 Parole Practices Survey* (Jannetta et al. 2009). In this report, the authors examine results at the state level to supplement and extend the analysis in *An Evolving Field* and provide a more nuanced understanding of the prevalence of evidence-based practice in the field. This report draws on data collected from 751 parole offices (out of 1,550 offices that received the survey) in 49 states, with the analyses focusing primarily on practices reported by 692 responding offices in the 36 states with sufficient responses to meet our inclusion criteria.

This level of analysis is important for two reasons: (1) because parole supervision policy is set at the state or local level, and (2) because variations in the structure of parole

field operations resulted in some states having a disproportionate impact on the national estimates. A state-level analysis of the survey results provides a more nuanced view of parole practices and, despite differences in population and structure of justice systems, shows the varying strengths, weaknesses, and similarities across states.

The survey results and analysis identified four key findings:

- *Widespread use of evidence-based practices and many components of effective parole supervision were reported.* In 27 of the 36 states included in this analysis, more than half the respondents indicated that their parole office employs some EBPs. Fundamental tools supporting effective parole practices—such as risk/needs assessment and sanctioning grids and guidelines—also appear to be in widespread use.
- *Uncertainty was common in the parole field regarding the definition of “evidence-based practices.”* In 11 of the 36 states, a quarter or more of respondents indicated that they were uncertain whether their parole office employs EBPs. Similar uncertainty was found regarding the use of motivational interviewing and agency efforts to track recidivism.
- *Many parole field offices do not know whether parolee recidivism is being tracked.* In 10 of the 36 states, a quarter or more of respondents were unsure whether their agency tracked the recidivism of *current* parolees. In 28 states, a quarter or more were unsure whether the recidivism of *former* parolees was tracked. This suggests that recidivism is not a key outcome for assessing field office performance in many states.
- *Approaches to enhance parolee motivation and engage the parolee’s pro-social supports are not common practice in many states.* Responses indicate that involving parolees in setting supervision goals, using motivational interviewing, and engaging significant others in the parolee’s life were occurring less than half the time in the majority of states included in this analysis. In the majority of states, most respondents indicated that earned discharge from supervision was not available.

Results revealed significant variation across states with each one reporting a unique mix of strengths and weaknesses. A number of states including Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Georgia reported widespread use of a number of evidence-based strategies. Case studies of South Dakota, Tennessee, and Arkansas supplement these findings, demonstrating how parole practices are changing over time and highlighting successful strategies policymakers and practitioners have taken to improve the adoption and implementation of EBPs. The lesson from these three states, which reported very different prevalence of evidence-based and promising practices, is that state policymakers can undertake significant efforts to successfully improve parole practice regardless of their state’s starting point.

These findings, at both the national and state levels, are a starting point, not an ending point, in the understanding of parole practice. Though evidence-based practices have been widely accepted in principle, implementation of these practices is the central chal-

lenge to making progress in the parole field. These challenges can be characterized in the following ways:

- *Systems approaches are required to change many practices.* Moving in the direction of effective parole practice is likely to require engaging institutional corrections, field supervision, the releasing authority, and other key stakeholders to develop a unified systems approach to facilitating reentry and supervision success.
- *Where uncertainty exists, clear communication and training are necessary.* Integrating new concepts into supervision is a continuous process of training and messaging. Resolving differences in interpretation and understanding of practice requires ongoing training and skill development, consistent messaging, and clear communication (often written) from agency leadership.
- *Barriers may exist to implementing motivation enhancement techniques.* There are many reasons parolee motivation techniques, such as involving parolees in case planning and using motivational interviewing, are not prevalent in the states. It may be that parole leadership has not emphasized the use of these practices, that line officers lack sufficient skills to use them, or that officer time needs to be freed from other workload requirements or large caseloads.

Efforts to gather information about parole supervision practice must continue, to help policymakers, parole leaders, and other stakeholders gauge the state of parole practice in their jurisdiction—where progress has been made and what must be improved to advance the challenging but essential field of parole supervision.



# Introduction

**P**arole supervision<sup>1</sup> is an integral part of delivering public safety for the community. As a key facilitator of the return of prisoners to the community, parole supervision agencies can help parolees become productive citizens and reduce the social harm they might cause through crime, substance abuse, and other problematic behaviors. The goals of parole supervision, however, are often unrealized. A substantial proportion of the more than 700,000 persons released from prison each year—most of whom are supervised upon release—will be reincarcerated within three years. The three-year rate of return to prison has been pegged at 45.4 percent for a 1999 release cohort in 33 states, and 43.3 percent in 41 states for a 2004 release cohort (Pew Center on the States 2011). At a time when budget crises are driving concerns about prison populations and their attendant costs, parole violators account for a third of admissions to state and federal prisons (West, Sabol, and Greenman 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, we use the term “parole supervision” to refer to a period of supervision in the community following release from prison, which may not be referred to as “parole” in every state. This includes supervision as the result of discretionary release via parole board decision as well as mandatory release to supervision.

This situation has led to greater emphasis on the emerging principles of effective parole supervision as a way to realize more benefits from the resource investment in post-prison community supervision (see Solomon et al. 2008; National Research Council 2007; and Taxman, Shepardson, and Byrne 2004). These principles are intended to reorient parole supervision away from a singular focus on constraining the ability of parolees to reoffend through surveillance and monitoring (risk control) to incorporate methods of changing parolee behavior in ways that will persist beyond the term of supervision (risk reduction). There have been increasing demands that parole supervision practices be “evidence-based”—consistent with and based on empirical findings regarding whether they work. (See Bourgon et al. 2010 for a good overview of the “what works” literature within the context of community supervision.) State and local jurisdictions across the country have undertaken concerted efforts to embed evidence-based practices for risk reduction into the daily operations of parole supervision. Adopting such practices can be a difficult task, as parole agencies nationwide struggle to manage increasingly large caseloads and expanding workloads with limited resources.

Despite these challenges, there are encouraging signs that outcomes for parolees are improving. The share of parolees successfully completing supervision rose from 45 percent in 2006 to 51 percent in 2009 (Glaze and Bonczar 2010a). The number of adults under state parole supervision declined from 2008 to 2009, the first observed decline in the parole population since 1996 (Glaze and Bonczar 2010b). It is difficult to determine whether a relationship exists between changes in parole supervision practice and parolee outcomes, and whether parole supervision practice is in fact changing. The 2008 Parole Practices Survey was deployed in an attempt to obtain some basic information regarding the state of parole supervision practice in the United States.

## The Parole Practices Survey

The Parole Practices Survey was designed to document practices at the field office level; determine the extent to which parole practitioners are using evidence-based practices (EBPs) and the 13 parole supervision strategies for enhancing reentry outlined in *Putting Public Safety First* (Solomon et al. 2008, see box 1); and identify the organizational factors that might play a role in determining the use of these practices and strategies. The survey was sent to all 1,550 parole field offices identified in 50 states and the District of Columbia. It contained questions on office structure, emphasis on EBPs, mission, collaboration, culture and climate, training and resources, responses to parole violations, and supervision policies and practices. The individual responsible for administering each parole office was asked to complete the survey. We received responses from 751 offices in 49 states (see table 1 for response rates by state). An aggregate national portrait of parole practice based on the results of the survey was presented in *An Evolving Field* (Jannetta et al. 2009), which also contains details on the methodology used in fielding the survey as well as a full copy of the survey instrument.

**Box 1. 13 PAROLE SUPERVISION STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE REENTRY OUTCOMES**

In collaboration with a group of leading practitioners, policymakers, and academics in the field of parole, the Urban Institute and its partners identified 13 strategies for effective community supervision. These strategies—consisting of both evidence-based practices and promising practices that help reduce recidivism—reflect an emerging expert consensus on what constitutes effective parole practice. The strategies are described in detail in *Putting Public Safety First: 13 Parole Supervision Strategies to Enhance Reentry Outcomes* (Solomon et al. 2008).

**Organizational Strategies**

1. Define success as recidivism reduction and measure performance.
2. Tailor conditions of supervision.
3. Focus resources on moderate- and high-risk parolees.
4. Frontload supervision resources.
5. Implement earned discharge.
6. Implement place-based supervision.
7. Engage partners to expand intervention capacities.

**Case Management Strategies**

8. Assess criminogenic risk and need factors.
9. Develop and implement supervision case plans that balance surveillance and treatment.
10. Involve parolees to enhance their engagement in assessment, case planning, and supervision.
11. Engage informal social controls to facilitate community reintegration.
12. Incorporate incentives and rewards into the supervision process.
13. Employ graduated problem-solving responses to violations of parole conditions in a swift and certain manner.

This report is a companion piece to *An Evolving Field*, examining state-level variation in parole practices. We are presenting these state-level results for two reasons. The first is that parole supervision policy is set at the state or local level,<sup>2</sup> so information regarding practices is of greater use to policymakers when presented by state. In fact, policymakers in several states have requested the results in this way, and state-level data will provide a valuable contribution to policymakers and practitioners across the country. The second reason is that states were not represented in the parole field office sample in proportion to the number of parolees they supervise, owing to variation in the structure of parole field operations. For example, 15 parole field offices were identified in New York (supervising a parole population of 52,000) and 46 in South Carolina (supervising a parole population of 1,900). Presenting the state-level results allows people to see the variance across states and contributes to a more nuanced representation of the nature of parole practice in the United States.

<sup>2</sup> In states such as Minnesota and Oregon, in which some or all parole supervision is operated at the county level, the results presented do not represent state practice but rather an aggregate of local practices.



TABLE 1. Survey Responses and Parole Populations

State (total number of offices)	Responding offices (% responding)	Parole population, 12/31/2008	Prison releases to supervision 2008	Parole violator % of prison admissions 2008
Alabama (62)	13 (21%)	8,042	63%	13%
Alaska (13)	7 (54%)	1,732	46%	n/a
Arizona (18)	15 (83%)	7,534	77%	16%
Arkansas (48)	44 (92%)	19,908	95%	24%
California (164)	60 (37%)	120,753	99%	67%
Colorado (19)	5 (26%)	11,654	85%	43%
Connecticut (4)	2 (50%)	2,328	46%	17%
Delaware (5)	5 (100%)	551	75%	19%
Florida (20)	4 (20%)	4,528	34%	0%
Georgia (49)	35 (71%)	23,448	10%	42%
Hawaii (5)	3 (60%)	1,904	37%	52%
Idaho (7)	3 (43%)	3,361	87%	7%
Illinois (26)	11 (42%)	33,683	88%	33%
Indiana (8)	6 (75%)	10,637	97%	38%
Iowa (37)	11 (30%)	3,159	52%	23%
Kansas (18)	8 (44%)	4,958	73%	30%
Kentucky (19)	10 (53%)	12,277	57%	26%
Louisiana (20)	13 (65%)	24,636	91%	31%
Maine (4)	3 (75%)	31	51%	50%
Maryland (40)	24 (60%)	13,220	91%	37%
Massachusetts (8)	5 (63%)	3,185	34%	10%
Michigan (85)	46 (54%)	22,523	85%	32%
Minnesota (78)	17 (22%)	5,081	84%	35%
Mississippi (10)	2 (20%)	2,922	66%	13%
Missouri (55)	42 (76%)	20,683	88%	46%
Montana (22)	14 (64%)	885	86%	15%
Nebraska (7)	5 (71%)	846	46%	13%
Nevada (9)	4 (44%)	3,908	55%	31%
New Hampshire (11)	4 (36%)	1,661	84%	50%
New Jersey (11)	4 (36%)	15,849	65%	25%
New Mexico (27)	11 (41%)	3,724	65%	34%

(continued)

TABLE 1.	(CONTINUED)			
New York (15)	7 (47%)	52,225	87%	40%
North Carolina (45)	13 (29%)	3,409	29%	4%
<i>North Dakota (14)</i>	4 (29%)	384	77%	32%
Ohio (19)	10 (53%)	19,119	50%	16%
Oklahoma (6)	4 (67%)	3,073	55%	29%
Oregon (31)	22 (71%)	22,195	95%	27%
Pennsylvania (74)	44 (59%)	72,951	67%	35%
<i>Rhode Island (9)</i>	0 (0%)	515	47%	15%
South Carolina (46)	37 (80%)	1,947	52%	31%
South Dakota (10)	10 (100%)	2,720	88%	29%
Tennessee (41)	29 (71%)	10,578	66%	41%
Texas (65)	15 (23%)	102,921	78%	35%
<i>Utah (23)</i>	5 (22%)	3,601	71%	48%
<i>Vermont (12)</i>	5 (42%)	1,080	90%	65%
Virginia (42)	33 (79%)	4,471	13%	5%
Washington (50)	29 (58%)	11,768	86%	47%
<i>West Virginia (16)</i>	4 (25%)	2,005	53%	40%
Wisconsin (99)	34 (34%)	18,105	94%	39%
Wyoming (23)	10 (43%)	727	55%	15%

Sources: Parole population from Glaze and Bonczar (2009). Releases to supervision and violators as a percentage of prison admissions calculated from West, Sabol, and Greenman (2010).

Note: States in italics were excluded from the analysis owing to insufficient response.

For some states, survey responses were insufficient for the data to meaningfully represent practice. Given the dearth of comparable information on parole supervision practices at the state level, we believed it was valuable to err on the side of inclusion, so we included any state with a response rate of 50 percent or more or at least 10 responding offices. For example, Hawaii (3 of 5 offices responding) was included, but Florida (4 of 20 offices responding) was not. Applying this standard resulted in the inclusion of 36 states in the analysis (see table 1). If some respondents in a state left survey items blank, so that the number of responses for that item did not meet our inclusion criteria, that state was excluded from analysis of that item.

We examined the representativeness of responding offices in terms of the size of the city in which the offices were located and the crime rates in those locations.<sup>3</sup> Cities with a population of 250,000 or more were categorized as large cities; those

<sup>3</sup> Parole offices may supervise parolees over an area well beyond the office location, and we did not have information on the catchment area for parole offices.

with populations between 50,000 and 249,999 were categorized as midsize cities; those with populations between 10,000 and 49,999 were categorized as small towns or cities; and areas with populations of less than 10,000 were categorized as rural. Using the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Report data, field offices were classified as located in a city with a high (upper 25 percent), medium (middle 50 percent), or low (lower 25 percent) crime rate based on whether they fell into the upper 25 percent, middle 50 percent, or lower 25 percent of crime rates. Responding offices in the states included in the analysis were reasonably representative of all offices in the same state on these dimensions. The exceptions are Alabama (less populous and lower crime areas overrepresented), Hawaii (less populous areas overrepresented), Illinois (more populous areas overrepresented), Iowa (less populous and lower crime areas overrepresented), and North Carolina (less populous areas overrepresented).

## Key Findings

*An Evolving Field* looked at the results of the 2008 Parole Practices Survey from a national perspective and described parole supervision as a field in flux, one that had made significant progress in adopting evidence-based and promising practices to enhance its ability to deliver public safety, but also with room to improve in a number of areas. This report supplements and extends that analysis by looking at American parole supervision practice as a mosaic composed of the varied parole supervision circumstances in the individual states. This view allows us to see parole practice in a more nuanced way, and to recognize the varying strengths and gaps in each state's parole practice, as well as areas of parole supervision practice that are fairly consistent across states.

Four broad findings emerged from this analysis:

- *Widespread use of evidence-based practices and many components of effective parole supervision were reported.* In 27 of the 36 states included in this analysis, more than half the respondents indicated that their parole office employs some EBPs. Fundamental tools supporting effective parole practice—such as risk/needs assessment and sanctioning grids and guidelines—also appear to be in widespread use.
- *Uncertainty was common in the parole field regarding the definition of “evidence-based practices.”* In 11 of the 36 states, a quarter or more of respondents indicated that they were uncertain whether their parole office employs EBPs. Similar uncertainty was found regarding the use of motivational interviewing and agency efforts to track recidivism.
- *Many parole field offices do not know whether parolee recidivism is being tracked.* In 10 of the 36 states, a quarter or more of respondents were unsure whether their agency tracked the recidivism of *current* parolees. In 28 states, a quarter or more were unsure whether the recidivism of *former* parolees was

tracked. This suggests that recidivism is not a key outcome for assessing field office performance in many states.

- *Approaches to enhance parolee motivation and engage the parolee's pro-social supports are not common practice in many states.* Responses indicate that involving parolees in setting supervision goals, using motivational interviewing, and engaging significant others in the parolee's life were occurring less than half the time in the majority of states included in this analysis. In the majority of states, most respondents indicated that earned discharge from supervision was not available.

The report is structured around these findings. After we elaborate on each of them, we present profiles of South Dakota, Tennessee, and Arkansas that show how the process of parole practice change can unfold in specific contexts. We conclude with some broad statements about the implications of these results for the direction of parole practices in the years to come.

## A Note on Interpretation

While the state-level aggregate data on parole practices in this report shed valuable light on parole supervision in the United States and in individual states, there are important limitations to consider in interpreting results. As shown in table 1, response rates varied across the states, and interpretations of results for states with lower response rates should be considered more provisional. Although it seems clear that the field of parole supervision is increasingly adopting evidence-based practices and practices consistent with the 13 strategies, it is difficult to ascertain from these results how ingrained these practices are in day-to-day supervision. Lasting changes in practice require policy setting at the agency level, diffusion to field units, and integration into the work of supervision line officers. The survey discussed in this report gathered data from the field unit level; it is suggestive but raises many questions regarding what is actually happening on the front lines. Data gathering on this level would substantially extend the understanding of parole supervision as experienced by parolees.

There are also challenges in interpreting what it means that practices are used "most of the time" or "some of the time." This variation could reflect practices in the process of being implemented at the time of the survey, practices employed only for certain parolees for strategic reasons, or more arbitrary variation in practice. Distinguishing among these possibilities requires additional data collection and study.

Caution is also warranted in drawing comparisons between states on the basis of these results. Differences in criminal justice populations and structures make comparisons between states inherently problematic and not necessarily beneficial. Most of the states included in the analysis operate parole supervision through a single state agency, but some, such as Oregon, do so largely at the county level (albeit in partnership with the Oregon Department of Corrections). States such as Minnesota have a

hybrid system in which the state Department of Corrections handles parole supervision in some parts of the state, while counties handle it in others. Thus, results presented in this study reflect practice under central administration in some cases and more decentralized practice in others, although variation within states is present in both cases. Thirty-five state parole supervision agencies supervise adult probationers as well as parolees (Bonczar 2008); although the survey questions clearly address practice for parolees only, consideration of practice for both populations may have skewed responses in some cases.

Table 1 also illustrates differences across states in the reach of parole supervision practices, in terms of the total number of parolees and the proportion leaving and returning to prison who are touched by parole supervision. For example, in California, almost everyone who leaves the prison system receives parole, while in Virginia, only a small proportion of those who exit prison are released to supervision, meaning that most of the challenges of facilitating reentry must be met outside the context of supervision.

Finally, the results of this survey reflect a snapshot of a moment in time in a field undergoing substantial change, and the survey was conducted just before most states began to feel the budget effects stemming from the global financial crisis. The profiles of Arkansas, South Dakota, and Tennessee indicate how much change can occur in just three years. The parole supervision field is evolving rapidly, and practice today may look significantly different than it did only three years ago.



# Parole Supervision Practices in the States

## **Finding 1. Widespread Reported Use of Evidence-Based Practices and Many Effective Parole Supervision Practices**

Incorporating evidence-based practices has been a primary focus of efforts to improve all aspects of corrections, including parole supervision, for at least the past decade. That focus is reflected in the results of the Parole Practices Survey. To shed light on the extent to which EBPs have penetrated parole operations at the field office level, the survey included a yes/no question about the parole office's use of EBPs, defined in the survey as "practices that have been supported and verified by research." While the concept of evidence-based practice has been widely absorbed in the field of parole supervision, and most respondents are presumably aware that indicating the use of such practices is the "right" answer, state-level responses varied. In 20 of the states included in this analysis, 75 percent or more of the respondents indicated that their offices were employing EBPs (see table 2). In five states, 40 percent or more of the respondents indicated that this was not the case, although the majority answered no in only one state.

The reported use of EBPs across the states is promising, but we still need to know what specific parole practices are in place. To provide a gauge of aggregate practice relative to the 13 strategies, we calculated a composite score of the extent to which respondents in each state reported that their offices were employing practices associated with the strategies. For the sake of simplicity, we assigned equal weight to all the practices, so the maximum possible score is 13 (see box 2). (See appendix A for scores for the individual practice elements, by state.)

The 13-point composite score consists of the following:

- Office tailors conditions of parole supervision for individual parolees (5-point scale).
- Office concentrates resources at the time of release (yes/no).

TABLE 2. Office Employs Evidence-Based Practices							
State (response rate)	Employs EBP <sub>s</sub> (% yes)	Employs EBP <sub>s</sub> (% no)	Employs EBP <sub>s</sub> (% unsure)	State (response rate)	Employs EBP <sub>s</sub> (% yes)	Employs EBP <sub>s</sub> (% no)	Employs EBP <sub>s</sub> (% unsure)
All offices (48%)	66	15	19	Minnesota (22%)	100	0	0
Alabama (21%)	11	44	44	Missouri (76%)	85	8	8
Alaska (54%)	57	14	29	Montana (64%)	86	14	0
Arizona (83%)	93	0	7	Nebraska (71%)	75	0	25
Arkansas (92%)	55	17	29	New Mexico (41%)	50	10	40
California (37%)	75	7	19	North Carolina (29%)	75	8	17
Connecticut (50%)	100	0	0	Ohio (53%)	50	10	40
Delaware (100%)	20	60	20	Oklahoma (67%)	100	0	0
Georgia (71%)	97	0	3	Oregon (71%)	95	5	0
Illinois (42%)	91	0	9	Pennsylvania (59%)	47	42	12
Indiana (75%)	100	0	0	South Carolina (80%)	24	18	58
Iowa (30%)	100	0	0	South Dakota (100%)	100	0	0
Kentucky (53%)	40	40	20	Tennessee (71%)	30	30	41
Louisiana (65%)	67	8	25	Texas (23%)	33	13	53
Maine (75%)	100	0	0	Virginia (79%)	47	47	6
Maryland (60%)	100	0	0	Washington (58%)	76	0	24
Massachusetts (63%)	80	20	0	Wisconsin (34%)	55	18	27
Michigan (54%)	62	20	18	Wyoming (43%)	75	0	25

Note: Figures may not total 100 percent owing to rounding.

**BOX 2. AGGREGATE PRACTICE SCORE CALCULATION**

Survey item responses related to parole practices were combined into a single aggregate practice score as follows. For yes/no/unsure items, the value was equal to the fraction of respondents that answered yes. For items ranked on a 5-point scale, values of 0 to 4 were assigned for the item (never = 0, some of the time = 1, about half the time = 2, most of the time = 3, always = 4), and the resulting average was divided by four. This produced a value for each item with a maximum possible value of 1 and a minimum possible value of 0. Higher scores indicate a greater prevalence of the parole practices measured by the survey. We combined the two recidivism tracking responses (for current and former parolees) into a single item, with each response worth half the value of the combined item. We did not calculate an aggregate score for a state if it failed to meet the inclusion criteria for any of the constituent items because of missing responses, which resulted in the exclusion of Massachusetts and Connecticut. A sample calculation is provided below.

Survey item	Item score	Calculation	Item score
Concentrates resources at point of release	94% yes	–	0.94
Provides incentives for meeting supervision goals	83% yes	–	0.83
Allows earned discharge	86%	–	0.86
Focuses resources on high-risk parolees	97% yes	–	0.97
Assigns officers by geographic area	77% yes	–	0.77
Uses sanctioning grid or guidelines	79% yes	–	0.79
Tracks recidivism of current parolees	94% yes	(0.94 + 0.20)/2	0.57
Tracks recidivism of former parolees	20% yes		
Tailors parole conditions to individual parolee	2.17	/4	0.54
Uses risk/needs assessment instrument	3.61	/4	0.90
Supervision incorporates treatment needs	3.63	/4	0.91
Parolee plays role in supervision goals and plans	2.26	/4	0.57
Uses motivational interviewing	1.75	/4	0.44
Involves parolee social supports	2.20	/4	0.55
Composite Score			9.64

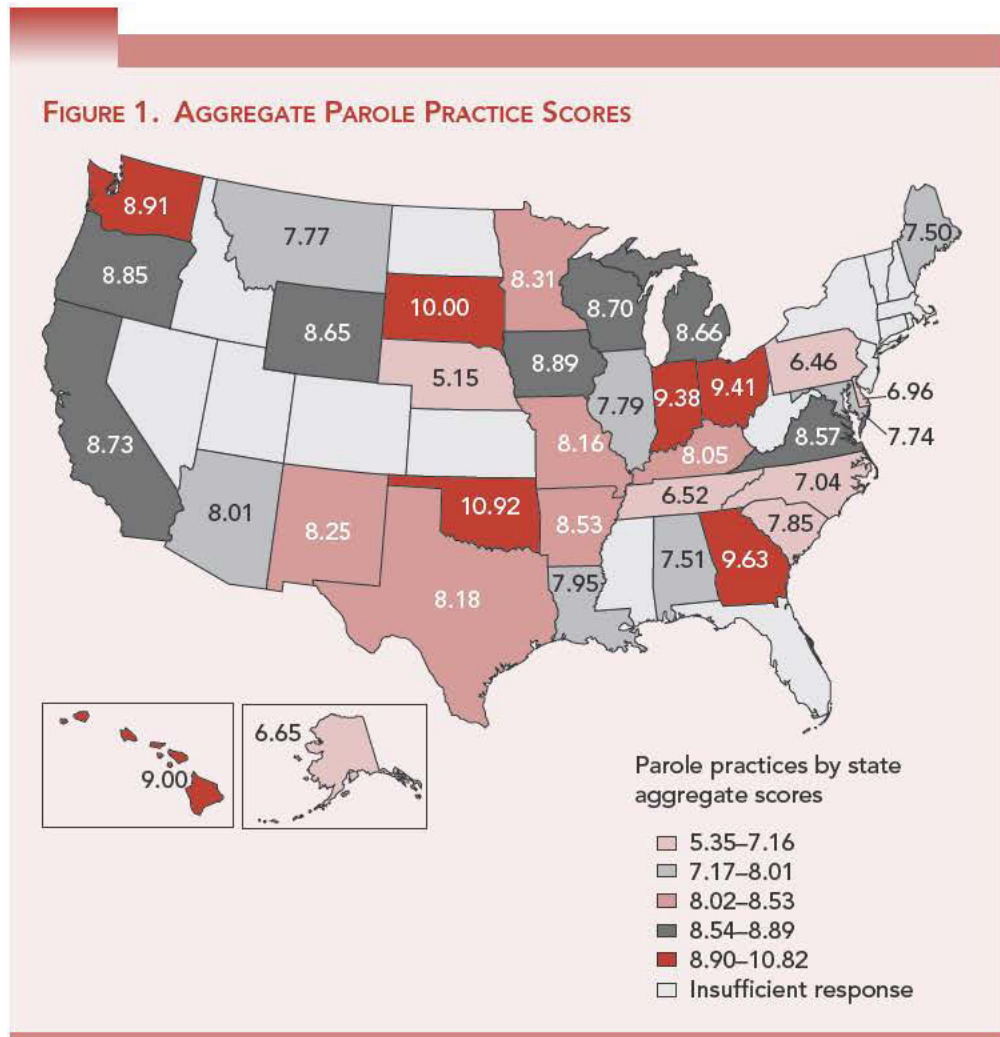


- Office provides incentives for meeting case-specific goals of supervision (yes/no).
- Parolees allowed to earn discharge from parole for meeting case-specific goals (yes/no).
- Office uses risk/need assessment tool (5-point scale).
- Office focuses additional resources on high-risk parolees (yes/no).
- Supervision requirements and activities routinely incorporate parolee treatment needs (5-point scale).
- Parolee plays a role in development of supervision goals and case plans (5-point scale).
- Office uses motivational interviewing (5-point scale).
- Officers involve significant others in the parolee's life and community in developing supervision goals (5-point scale).
- Office assigns officers to specific geographic areas or a satellite office in the neighborhood where parolees reside (yes/no).
- Agency tracks recidivism rates of current and former parolees (separate items, yes/no).
- Office uses sanctioning grid or guidelines to determine appropriate sanctions (yes/no).

Figure 1 shows the distribution of scores by quintile. Oklahoma had the highest aggregate score (10.92), followed by South Dakota (10.00), Georgia (9.63), Ohio (9.41), and Indiana (9.38). The 13 strategies are a mix of EBPs and promising practices identified by leading practitioners and researchers, so it would not be inconsistent for a state to report a high level of EBP use and still have a low aggregate practice score (or vice versa). Among the five states with the highest aggregate practice scores, only Ohio had lower than average reported levels of use of EBPs (50 percent said yes, 40 percent were unsure).

Each state's mix of practices is different, but as the scores indicate, all the states included in the survey are employing at least some of the practices in some offices. The 10 states with the highest aggregate practice scores (8.73 and above) are a disparate group in terms of size, number of parole offices, and regions, and include states with centrally administered and decentralized parole functions. To the extent that the aggregate score gauges the extent of effective parole practices, it suggests that these practices can be advanced in very different operational environments. States throughout the range of overall scores show strengths and gaps. Two-thirds of the states with the highest aggregate scores (i.e., the six in the top quintile) have scores among the 10 lowest for an individual practice measured in the survey, while two-thirds of the states with the lowest aggregate scores have scores among the 10 highest for at least one practice.

The foundation of evidence-based approaches to supervision is directing supervision by risk (likelihood of reoffending), need (individual deficits that must be addressed in order to reduce risk), and responsivity (tailoring interventions to suit individual parolee



characteristics) (Bourgon et al. 2010; Andrews and Bonta 2006). Attention to the three elements (commonly referred to as the RNR principles) should be built into the structure of parole supervision, including how officer time is allocated, how supervision conditions and goals are set, and how responses to violations are determined. Practices related to this kind of supervision structure were among the most common in the practice mix of the states in our analysis.

### Assessing Risk and Need

Risk and need must be established through valid tools before they can play any role in parole supervision. In 30 of the 36 states included in the analysis, the average score for the use of risk/needs assessment was greater than 3 ("most of the time"). Only two states were at or below the midpoint score of 2 ("about half the time"). On the basis of these results, it seems fair to say that the use of risk/needs assessment has become standard practice in parole supervision in the United States.

Similarly promising results emerged in the reported use of risk and need information to inform decisions about resource allocation and case planning. The survey asked whether parole offices focused additional supervision resources on high-risk parolees, and the answer was yes for 90 percent or more of offices in 31 of the 36 states. In no state did fewer than 60 percent of respondents say yes to this question. (This result may be partially an artifact of the question defining focusing on higher risk parolees “in contrast to equal amounts of resources dedicated to all parolees regardless of risk level,” an approach unlikely to be found in many parole offices.) Results were slightly more varied for another form of resource allocation based on risk: front-loading resources to the initial period following release, when the risk of failure is greatest (Ball, Weisberg, and Dansky 2009; Rosenfeld, Wallman, and Fornango 2005). When asked whether they devoted additional resources to parolees in the days and weeks after release, at least 75 percent of respondents said yes in 25 of the states. In only five states did fewer than half the respondents say yes.

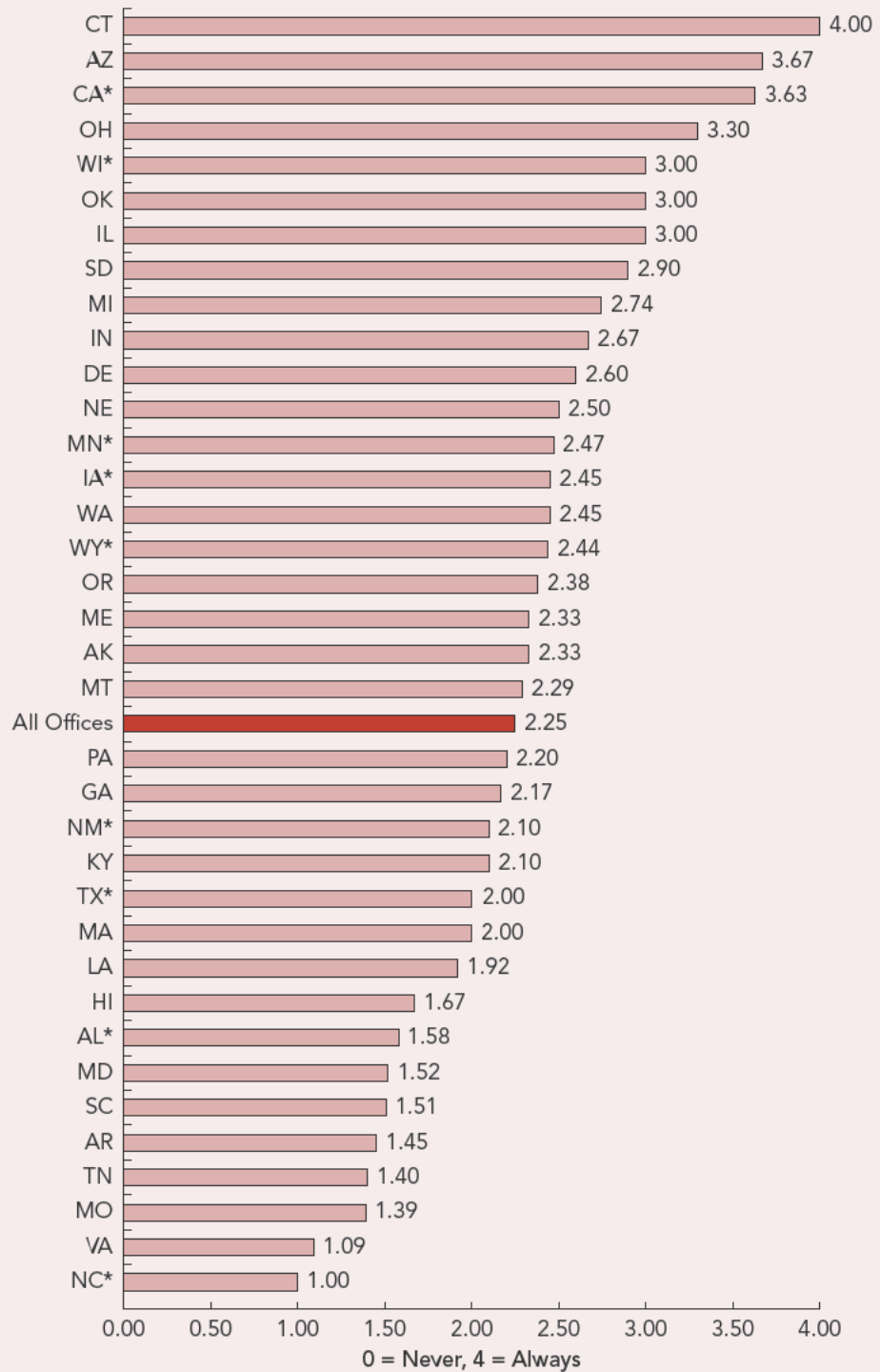
### Supervision Conditions and Activities

In an RNR framework, supervision varies according to the risk and need factors of the individual parolee. Conditions of parole supervision are most effective in contributing to behavioral change when they are realistic (parolees are capable of complying with them and the parole agency has the resources to track them), relevant (all are related to the parolee’s criminogenic risk and need factors), and research based (supported by evidence of effectiveness) (Wicklund 2005). The survey asked whether parole offices tailored conditions of supervision to individual parolees. The results are presented in figure 2. Only seven of the states in the analysis had aggregate scores of 3 or higher; 10 had scores below the midpoint of 2, indicating that this is the case less than half the time. These results suggest that while tailoring conditions occurs to some extent in many states, it is an area with substantial room for progress. The survey also asked to what degree parolee treatment needs were integrated into supervision requirements and activities in addition to surveillance and enforcement priorities. This practice is reported to be much more common than tailoring of conditions: 31 of the 36 states scored at or above 3, and only two states scored at or below the midpoint.

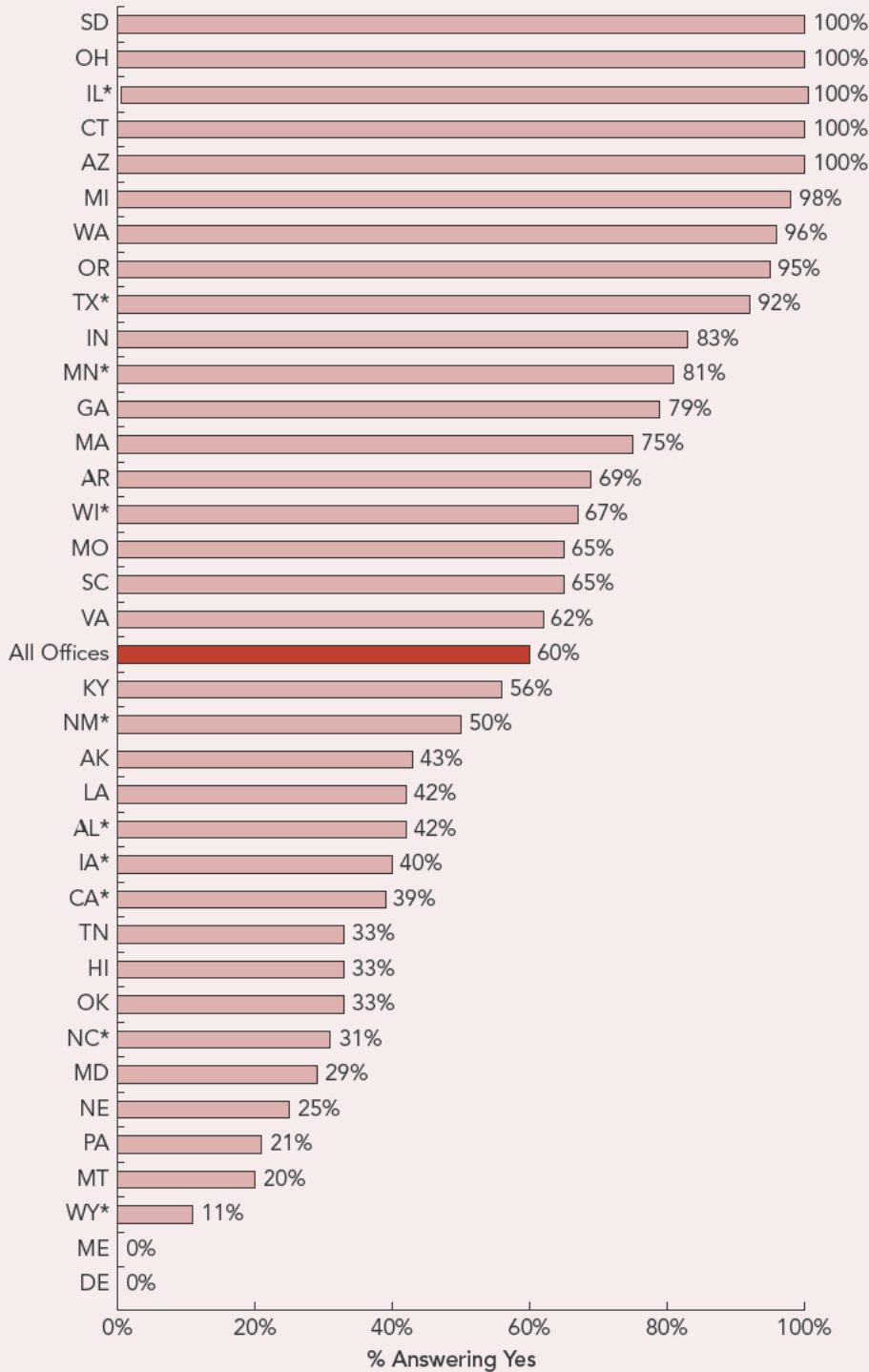
### Structured Response to Violations

Sanctioning grids or guidelines ensure that sanctions for parole violations are applied consistently and appropriately. They often incorporate risk and need information. As with risk/needs assessment, sanctioning grids and guidelines appear to be in widespread use, at least in terms of a presence in many states. As shown in figure 3, only two states had no respondents saying they were in use, and in another four states a quarter or fewer said so. Yet the lack of agreement within states is an interesting finding, and a challenging one to interpret. One possible explanation is that the results reflect variation based on a staged implementation process, as was happening with California’s rollout of the Parole Violation Decision Making Instrument in the fall of 2008, the same period during which the survey was in the field. In states where parole

**FIGURE 2. CONDITIONS OF PAROLE TAILORED FOR INDIVIDUAL PAROLEES**



**FIGURE 3. OFFICE USES SANCTIONING GRID OR GUIDELINES**



supervision is decentralized, it may be that some counties/supervision districts have such a tool and others do not.

## **Finding 2. Significant Uncertainty Regarding Evidence-Based Practices**

Perhaps the most significant finding regarding EBPs was the extent to which respondents expressed uncertainty about them. A higher proportion of respondents indicated “unsure” when asked if their office used EBPs (19 percent) than indicated “no” (15 percent), meaning that lower levels of reported use of EBPs were more often the result of uncertainty than of negative responses (see table 2). This was a consistent finding in the survey: At least 15 percent of respondents answered “unsure” to the seven questions that asked directly about EBPs. Among the states included in this analysis was a subset that had even higher proportions of uncertain respondents. In 12 states, a quarter or more of respondents were unsure whether their office employed EBPs.

This level of uncertainty differentiated EBPs from most of the other realms of practice covered in the survey. Only the items about use of motivational interviewing (13 percent of respondents were unsure whether their office used it) and recidivism tracking (discussed in the next section) produced comparable levels of uncertainty.

The uncertainty may derive from an unclear definition of EBPs. The idea that commitment to evidence-based practice is an indispensable part of effective correctional practice is widespread, but clarity on which practices are supported by research evidence, or even what constitutes meaningful evidence, may be in short supply in the field. In fact, it appears that uncertainty regarding EBPs can coexist with their use. The four states in this analysis with the highest levels of uncertainty regarding whether their offices use EBPs also scored higher than 3 (“most of the time”) for the question on use of risk/needs assessment, which qualifies as an EBP. While this finding suggests that clearing up uncertainty about EBPs at the field office level is not a precondition to using them, a greater understanding of EBPs throughout parole agencies will put them in a stronger position to reap the full benefit of the developing literature on what works in community supervision.

Reducing uncertainty about EBPs is partly a task for agency leaders, who must communicate clearly and consistently what evidence-based practice is if they expect field units to integrate it fully into their operations. Field personnel should be engaged in a discussion of the rationale behind putting new practices and policies into place, whether through agency initiative or legislative mandate. The uncertainty we found through the survey also suggests a challenge to the research and expert communities to provide clear and consistent guidance regarding what are and are not evidence-based practices, and to get that information into the hands of field practitioners.

Finally, this gap can be addressed by agencies (or state and local governments) themselves; they need to set up structures to measure the effectiveness of their practices and feed that information back to their field-level parole staff.

### **Finding 3. Many Parole Field Offices Do Not Know Whether Parolee Recidivism Is Being Tracked**

Defining success as reducing recidivism and measuring the agency's performance in meeting that goal is the first of the 13 strategies; it is fundamental in a focused agency approach to delivering on public safety. "What gets measured gets done" is a common mantra of performance measurement, so the survey included items asking whether the agency tracks recidivism of current and former parolees. The survey did not frame this question in terms of a standard definition of recidivism but rather asked what measure (or measures) of recidivism the responding office used.

Table 3 summarizes the responses to this question. Tracking recidivism appears to be common practice across the country: Only four states had 20 percent or more "no" responses, although responses of "unsure" were prevalent. Regardless of whether agencies are tracking parolee recidivism, if field office administrators are not aware of it, that information is not being used for performance management.

Tracking recidivism of current parolees is obviously important, but the proof of a behavior-change approach is in what happens after formal criminal justice control ends. As control through parole supervision pulls back, informal social controls provided by the parolee's contacts in the community (family, employers, etc.) come to the fore to cement behavior change. Determining whether this is happening requires tracking the recidivism of former parolees. Because of the resources involved and the fact that the data necessary to track post-supervision recidivism may reside outside the supervision agency, this is much less common than tracking recidivism for current parolees. As with tracking recidivism of current parolees, the most striking issue is how many respondents are unsure whether recidivism of former parolees is being tracked.

### **Finding 4. Approaches to Enhance Parolee Motivation and Engage Pro-social Supports Are Uncommon**

The underlying logic of adopting a risk reduction approach to parole supervision is that eventually the term of supervision will end for almost all parolees, and informal social controls must take on the role of facilitating and reinforcing positive parolee behavior change. Informal social controls include individual self-control and problem solving, but family, social networks, employers, and others in the community play a

**TABLE 3. Office Tracks Recidivism of Current and Former Parolees**

State (response rate)	Current Parolees			Former Parolees		
	% Yes	% No	% Unsure	% Yes	% No	% Unsure
All Offices (48%)	73%	10%	15%	12%	37%	46%
Alabama (21%)	77%	0%	23%	15%	31%	54%
Alaska (54%)	14%	43%	43%	0%	29%	57%
Arizona (83%)	100%	0%	0%	0%	40%	60%
Arkansas (92%)	89%	0%	2%	7%	18%	66%
California (37%)	78%	10%	12%	5%	45%	48%
Connecticut (50%)	50%	0%	50%	**	**	**
Delaware (100%)	40%	20%	40%	0%	60%	40%
Georgia (71%)	89%	6%	0%	9%	31%	57%
Hawaii (60%)	67%	0%	33%	0%	33%	67%
Illinois (42%)	100%	0%	0%	91%	0%	9%
Indiana (75%)	67%	17%	17%	50%	33%	17%
Iowa (30%)	73%	9%	9%	27%	27%	27%
Kentucky (53%)	80%	10%	10%	20%	30%	50%
Louisiana (65%)	69%	8%	15%	15%	31%	46%
Maine (75%)	100%	0%	0%	33%	67%	0%
Maryland (60%)	67%	4%	25%	0%	54%	42%
Massachusetts (63%)	100%	0%	0%	60%	40%	0%
Michigan (54%)	78%	9%	11%	0%	41%	57%
Minnesota (22%)	71%	24%	0%	29%	59%	6%
Missouri (76%)	83%	0%	12%	14%	24%	57%
Montana (64%)	79%	7%	14%	0%	57%	43%
Nebraska (71%)	60%	0%	20%	80%	0%	20%
New Mexico (41%)	36%	9%	45%	9%	27%	64%
North Carolina (29%)	69%	0%	31%	0%	31%	69%
Ohio (53%)	90%	0%	10%	20%	50%	30%
Oklahoma (67%)	100%	0%	0%	33%	33%	33%
Oregon (71%)	86%	9%	0%	59%	18%	9%
Pennsylvania (59%)	48%	45%	2%	2%	91%	2%
South Carolina (80%)	51%	16%	32%	3%	38%	59%
South Dakota (100%)	40%	0%	60%	0%	20%	80%
Tennessee (71%)	72%	14%	14%	3%	38%	59%



**TABLE 3. (Continued)**

State (response rate)	Current Parolees			Former Parolees		
	% Yes	% No	% Unsure	% Yes	% No	% Unsure
Texas (23%)	73%	0%	27%	7%	33%	53%
Virginia (79%)	58%	15%	24%	15%	36%	45%
Washington (58%)	79%	3%	17%	21%	10%	62%
Wisconsin (34%)	50%	18%	32%	9%	44%	44%
Wyoming (43%)	70%	10%	10%	30%	0%	60%

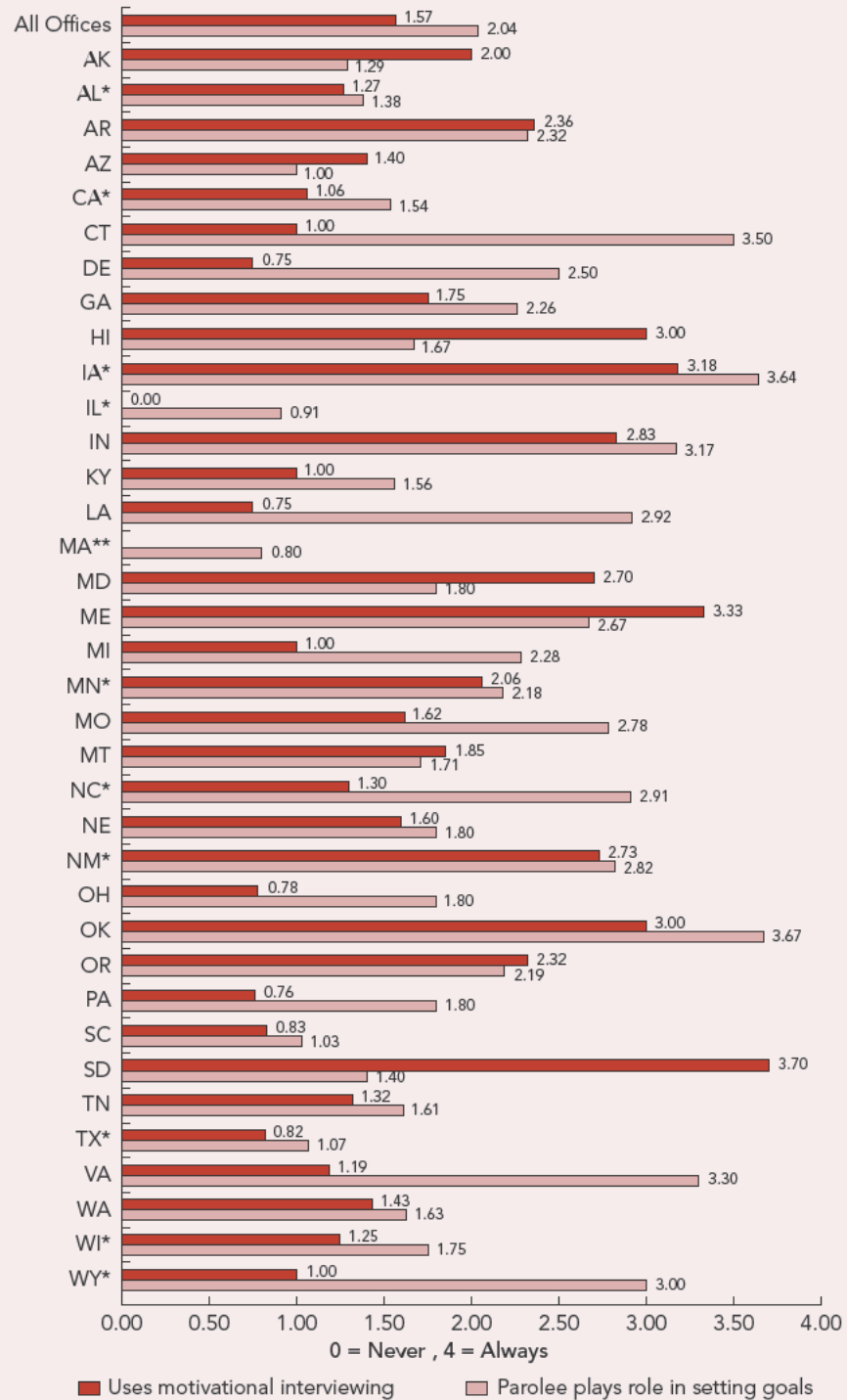
Note: Percentages may not total 100 percent owing to rounding.

crucial role as well. Changing behavior is challenging for anyone, and even parolees with the best intentions are likely to experience ambivalence. For this reason, engaging parolees and their families and communities in accomplishing the goals of their supervision in ways that will enhance their motivation to comply is very important. The results of the survey indicate that this is an area in which many states have significant room for improvement.

One method of enhancing parolee motivation is to provide incentives and rewards for supervision goals, and the survey results were most promising in this area. Asked whether their offices provide incentives for meeting goals of supervision, three-quarters or more of respondents in 16 of the 36 states said yes. In four states, fewer than half the respondents said their offices provided incentives. An open-ended question offered respondents the opportunity to identify the incentives they offered. Nearly 75 percent of the incentives involved adjustment to supervision requirements, such as reduced reporting requirements (number of requirements) or less frequent contacts; respondents could and did list multiple incentives. While these are certainly meaningful incentives, they can presumably be achieved only through extended periods of parole compliance. Many parolees may need more immediate rewards for more modest milestones to stay on the right track, particularly early in their term of supervision.

The opportunity to earn discharge from parole supervision is a powerful incentive for parolees to meet supervision goals. This mechanism also facilitates concentrating resources on higher risk parolees. In four states, 100 percent of respondents reported that their office allowed parolees to earn their way off parole supervision; in another five states, more than 85 percent of respondents said the same. In seven states, not a single office reported earned discharge as an option. There were very few responses of “unsure,” so it is unclear what accounts for the mixed practice (or perceptions of practice) in the other states. It could be due to policy variation within states, whether the option of earned discharge is consistently available, or variation in the extent to which offices actually discharge parolees from supervision.

**FIGURE 4. PAROLEES PLAY A ROLE IN SETTING SUPERVISION GOALS AND USE OF MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING**



\* less than 50% response rate  
 \*\* Excluded due to missing responses

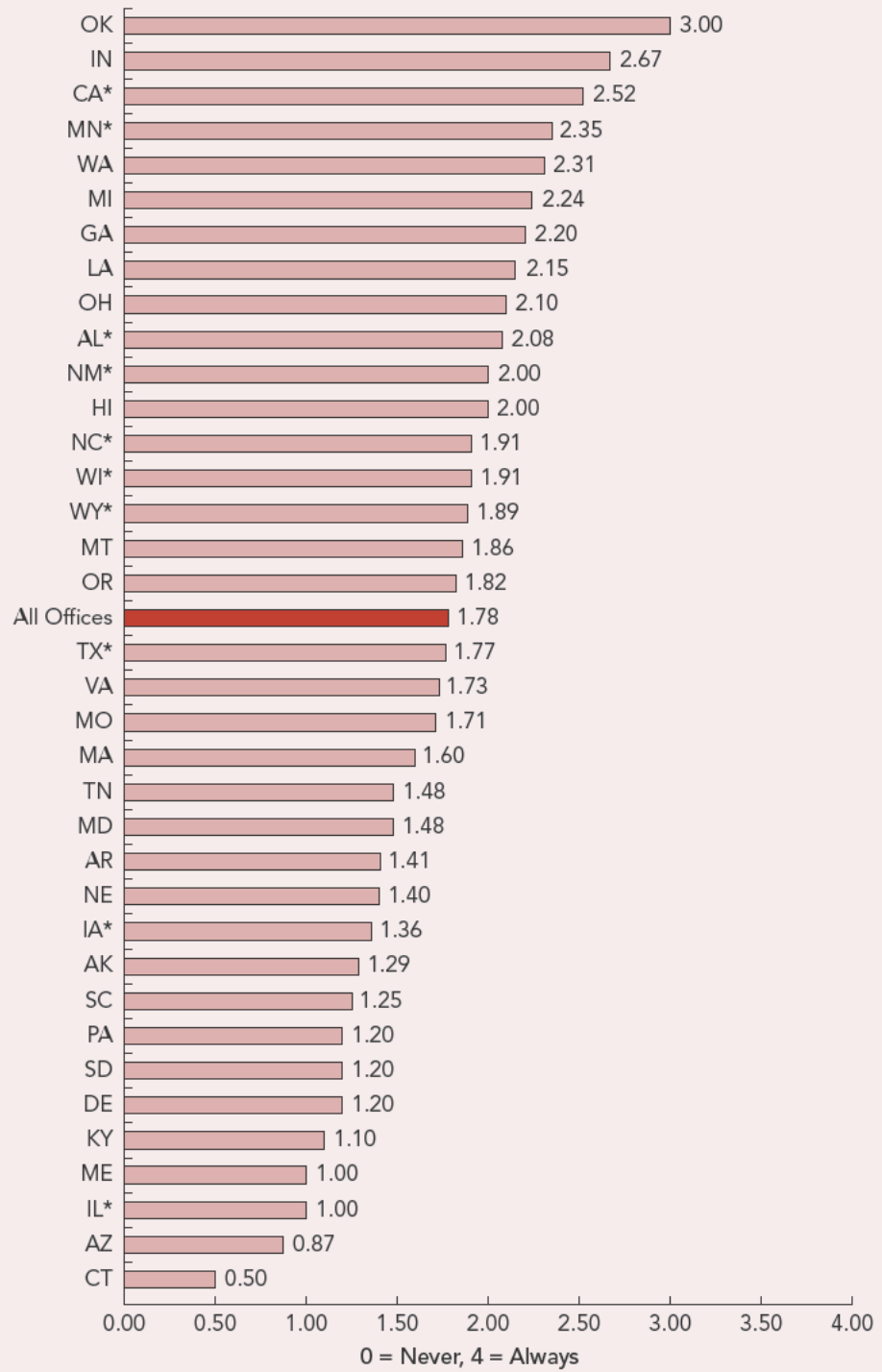
Another method of enhancing parolees' motivation is involving them in the development of their supervision goals and case plans. Motivational Interviewing uses routine interactions to enhance parolee motivation. The survey asked whether parole offices used these techniques; the results—on a 5-point scale from 0 (never) to 4 (always)—are presented in figure 4.

Both involvement of parolees in case planning and use of motivational interviewing are much less common than many other practices assessed by the survey. In the majority of states in the analysis, both practices are used less than half the time (scores of less than 2). Only six states had a score of 3 or higher ("most of the time") for involving parolees in the development of supervision goals and case plans; five states had a score of 3 or higher for use of motivational interviewing. There was also a degree of uncertainty regarding motivational interviewing: more than 20 percent of respondents in the following states selected "unsure" for that item: Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas.

Social supports can be invaluable reinforcers of parole supervision goals and expectations, provided they are aware and supportive of those goals and expectations. However, engagement of social supports appears to be an uncommon practice. Only 12 states had a score at or above the midpoint on the 5-point scale for the item on involving the parolee's significant others in developing supervision goals or achieving positive outcomes, by far the lowest proportion of any item scored in this way (see figure 5). One strategy that can alleviate the difficulty of engaging informal social supports is neighborhood- or place-based supervision, in which officer caseloads correspond geographically to areas where high concentrations of parolees live. According to the survey results, this is a common, though far from universal, practice. In only eight states did fewer than half the respondents say their office conducted place-based supervision. As might be expected, location has a considerable impact on whether this practice is used. Among offices in large cities, 71 percent of respondents said "yes" to this item, compared with 67 percent in mid-sized cities, 60 percent in small towns, and 59 percent in rural areas.

Clearly, more work is needed to implement these practices at the field level. The survey data do not enable us to examine whether the relative rarity of these practices reflects a lack of consensus in the field about whether they should be part of parole supervision or the difficulty of integrating them. Involving parolees in setting supervision goals, using motivational interviewing, and engaging pro-social supports are all labor-intensive activities, requiring parole officer "face time" that may be in short supply. Many officers manage large caseloads and heavy workloads; it could be that these practices are recognized as valuable but are crowded out by the daily work of keeping up with dozens of parolees and other tasks. These interpersonal practices also require resource investment, such as training on motivational interviewing techniques and creation of a case planning structure to support parolee input on supervision goals. South Dakota has the highest score for use of motivational interviewing, because it committed to training all parole agents in this technique.

**FIGURE 5. PAROLE OFFICERS INVOLVE PRO-SOCIAL SUPPORTS IN SUPERVISION**





## State Profiles

**N**ot surprisingly, a broad understanding of evidence-based practice is not universal across the states. The fact that many respondents were unsure whether their agency was using EBPs suggests that agencies are not prioritizing them. Even in states where field officers report understanding and emphasizing EBPs, many of the 13 strategies are not widely used. Whether states lack a basic understanding of evidence-based practice, do not emphasize it, or lag in the implementation of the 13 strategies, there is significant room for improvement.

On the other hand, several states have embraced EBPs and are supervising parolees accordingly. These states demonstrate a keen understanding of EBPs and report using many of the 13 strategies. It is important to remember, however, that the field of parole supervision is evolving quickly, and many states have undergone significant organizational and policy changes since they responded to the Parole Practices Survey.

The profiles below highlight three states—South Dakota, Tennessee, and Arkansas—that exemplify the rapidly evolving field of parole supervision. Not only have these states built a knowledge base among field and line officers (a critical first step in embedding EBPs), they have undertaken large-scale organizational change and state policy reform efforts to speed and sustain the implementation of EBPs.

Though not without challenges, these efforts promise to institutionalize EBPs in the state and improve agency and parolee outcomes, including reducing the number of parolees who are returned to a costly prison bed.

## South Dakota: Committing to Continuous Improvement

South Dakota has been working systematically for a decade to implement effective parole practices. One of two states with a 100 percent response rate to the survey, South Dakota was second only to Oklahoma in its aggregate practice score. This score reflects a change process well under way in 2008, when the survey was administered, and continuing in the years since.

“The South Dakota Department of Corrections and the Parole Board are committed to reducing recidivism through organizational competency development and the incorporation of the thirteen parole supervision strategies to enhance reentry outcomes. This requires the collaboration of the correctional system and community partners, the creation of a more effective and efficient service delivery system, the application of cost-benefit analysis, and the use of research to examine results.”

ED LIGTENBERG, DIRECTOR OF PAROLE

South Dakota initiated its systems approach to parole supervision in 2003 in an attempt to reduce parole violations and enhance public safety (see Ligtenberg and Clark 2006). Targeting violations was timely; as the recent Pew Center on the States study (2011) found, returns to prison were steady between the 1999 and 2004 release cohort (11 percent and 12 percent), but returns for technical violations were substantially higher for offenders released in 2004 (34 percent, compared with 23 percent for the 1999 release cohort). The systems approach recognized that parole violations could not be reduced by parole supervision staff alone but required a joint effort with institutional corrections and the parole board.

The systems approach included use of objective risk/needs assessment tools (the Level of Service Inventory-Revised and a locally developed and validated community risk/needs tool); the development of a Supervision Accountability Plan (SAP); and a Policy Driven Responses to Technical Parole Violations (PDR) initiative. Through the PDR initiative, violation responses were guided by assessment information and a tool to standardize responses, including alternative placement in the community for violators. Regular review of the SAP allowed officers to engage parolees in the goals of their supervision. All South Dakota parole agents received training in motivational interviewing, which explains why South Dakota had the highest score for use of motivational interviewing of any state in the survey analysis.

The state made a commitment to focus specific programming, case management, and community resources on moderate- to high-risk offenders, and to reserve intensive

case supervision and treatment plans for high-risk offenders. The Department of Corrections coordinates with the Department of Human Services to set up chemical dependency aftercare and mental health follow-up appointments for inmates before they leave the institution. For low-risk parolees who are doing well on supervision, discharge is available through the Parole Board's Earned Discharge Program. South Dakota also developed a COMPSTAT performance management process (based on the New York City Police Department system) that includes a "report card" for parole agents, indicating how well they are meeting performance goals linked to recidivism reduction.

South Dakota was not content to rest at this stage of progress. The secretary of corrections responded to the release of *Putting Public Safety First* by requesting that the Parole Division outline current compliance with the 13 strategies and draft plans to improve practice consistent with each strategy. The governor convened a statewide Reentry Council in 2009 to coordinate reentry policy. The state received a Second Chance Act grant to increase use of institutional and community resources to target higher risk offenders. In 2010, the secretary of corrections announced a goal of reducing recidivism by 50 percent over five years. Even with all the progress South Dakota had made in improving parole practice, meeting that aggressive goal required continuous improvement. The state applied for and received technical assistance through the National Parole Resource Center (NPRC)<sup>4</sup> to enhance parole practice in both release decisions and field supervision, and secured training for agents in the Effective Practices in Community Supervision model to change agent-parolee interactions into directed interventions focused on criminogenic need.

South Dakota requested that NPRC's technical assistance focus on a number of key areas in which state practice was not yet up to the desired standard. The Parole Board now receives risk assessment, release planning, and programming information, which allows it to tailor conditions of supervision; however, most parolees still receive a set of generic conditions, while only a small number receive conditions tailored to individual criminogenic needs. Integrating the case management and release planning activities between prison and field supervision to create a seamless handoff is a work in progress, as is integrating parolee family members into a collaborative case management process. As South Dakota addresses these gaps in practice, the results are promising: Parole revocations declined by 19 percent from 2009 to 2010.

## Tennessee: Moving Rapidly to Improve Practice

The 2008 Parole Practices Survey caught Tennessee on the cusp of a leap forward in parole supervision practice on a number of fronts. The Tennessee Board of Probation and Parole (BOPP) began its Think BIG (Behavior Intervention Goals) initiative in 2007,

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<sup>4</sup> See [www.nationalparoleresourcecenter.org](http://www.nationalparoleresourcecenter.org).

focused on case management to facilitate offender success and encourage parole officers to do more work in the field. Tennessee also launched a Technical Violator Diversion Program (TVDP) to reduce the 14-month average length of stay in prison for technical parole violators. BOPP extended the Think BIG work by collaborating on a Joint Offender Management Plan (JOMP) with the Tennessee Department of Correction (TDOC) beginning in 2009.

The focus of JOMP was reducing correctional costs to the state, particularly through reducing parole and probation revocations. To do this, monies were shifted from TDOC to BOPP to support treatment interventions in the community through the treatment services network developed by the Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities. BOPP and TDOC integrated their case planning into a unified process, TAP (Transition and Assessment Plan)/BIG. TDOC provided funding for BOPP to implement the LS/CMI so that a consistent risk/needs assessment would underpin the TAP/BIG process across the two agencies. Many elements of JOMP are consistent with the 13 strategies and effective parole practices generally, including reliance on assessment (using the LS/CMI), development of a transition plan (the TAP/BIG), and use of motivational interviewing to enhance individual commitment to change.

As the JOMP work unfolded, Tennessee joined the Transition from Prison to Community (TPC) Initiative<sup>5</sup> to further enhance its transition and supervision work. The TPC model's comprehensive approach to reentry gave the state a framework to build on, enabling it to expand beyond the tight focus of JOMP on fiscal goals and reduction in revocations. By early 2011, all parolees had a completed LS/CMI, and TDOC was trying to ensure that every person who came before the Parole Board for a release decision had a completed assessment. The board was eager to have this information to incorporate into its decisionmaking and condition-setting. The board requested assistance from the National Parole Resource Center to revise and update its release decisionmaking guidelines to align with changes in practice, such as targeting conditions of supervision to criminogenic needs as established by the LS/CMI. Training for BOPP field staff was well under way to support a "motivational interaction" approach to interactions with parolees. BOPP also emphasized gender-responsive approaches as part of supervising female parolees in the community.

The budget crisis in Tennessee has reinforced the push to improve parole practice by increasing the necessity to reduce returns to custody among the supervised population. JOMP generated significant savings for Tennessee in its first year, with much of the BOPP savings attributable to fewer parole revocations and increased use of local community corrections programs. The average length of stay for parole

"We're supposed to be motivating parolees to change, and at the same time we're motivating ourselves. If we don't believe it, we won't help the offender."

CHARLES TRAUGHBER, CHAIRMAN,  
BOARD OF PROBATION AND PAROLE

<sup>5</sup> See [www.prisontransition.com](http://www.prisontransition.com) for details.



violators returned to TDOC has also declined substantially (from 14 months to just over 6 months) since 2006, when the TVDP began enrolling participants.

Now that the assessment and case planning base is largely in place, the focus has shifted to ensuring that interventions are available to meet identified criminogenic needs. Insufficient housing, employment, drug treatment, and mental health resources in the community present a continuing challenge. Both BOPP and TDOC are focusing TPC efforts on culture change in both organizations to ensure that the operational changes they have made are fully understood and embraced by staff at all levels and that progress will be enduring.

## Arkansas: Institutionalizing Parole Practice through Policy Change

To ensure that parole supervision agencies are employing EBPs, state policymakers are increasingly mandating them in law. States such as Arizona, Arkansas, Kansas, Kentucky, and South Carolina have passed legislation that requires community corrections to define success as recidivism reduction and to implement EBPs such as risk/needs assessment, graduated sanctions, and earned discharge.

In March 2011, Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe signed the Public Safety Improvement Act into law. The act is based on the recommendations of the Arkansas Working Group on Sentencing and Corrections, which included the former director of the Department of Community Correction (DCC), David Guntharp, and the current director, David Eberhard. The working group was established by Governor Beebe, Chief Justice Jim Hannah, and legislative leadership in 2010 to analyze sentencing and corrections data, audit community supervision policies, and recommend a package of legislative reforms to contain prison growth and improve public safety.

The Public Safety Improvement Act will strengthen parole supervision by requiring DCC to do the following:

- Conduct risk/needs assessment at intake and use the results to set conditions of supervision and assign programming.
- Focus on high-risk offenders by implementing earned discharge.
- Use swift, certain, and proportional sanctions—day reporting, community service, and short jail stays—and a graduated sanctioning grid to determine responses to violations.
- Direct an increase in parole fees to a “best practices fund” that can only be spent on evidence-based programs.

According to the consensus report of the working group, the policy recommendations were designed to “reinforce one another in a virtuous cycle: efforts to reduce recidivism fuel reductions in the prison population that will, in turn, sustain progress by allowing

“While the Department of Community Correction had been steadily moving toward the use of evidence-based practices prior to the passage of the Public Safety Improvement Act, the adoption of the Act into law ensures the acceleration of that movement, and, to the extent that additional resources are realized, will lead to the continued and more effective use of such practices in the future.”

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for investments that will further improve public safety.” In other words, by implementing EBPs in community corrections, the state will reap significant cost savings through reduced revocations to prison; these savings can then be invested in the community-based supervision, sanctions, and services provided by parole agencies.

These recommendations stemmed from the working group’s review of the literature on what works in community supervision; data suggesting that parole and probation failures were a leading driver of increases in the prison population; and anecdotal evidence that criminal justice stakeholders had lost faith in the DCC because it lacked the authority to effectively supervise probationers and parolees.

In fact, the working group’s assessment of community supervision revealed many of the same gaps as the Parole Practices Survey. In 2008, Arkansas had one of the lowest composite EBP scores, and respondents reported very low use of important strategies such as tailoring conditions of supervision, providing incentives for meeting supervision goals, and incorporating treatment needs into case plans.

Arkansas is a prime example of a state that needed legislation not just to commit agency leadership and line staff to the principles of evidence-based practice but to give them the necessary authority and mandate to do so. Without changes in the law, the DCC could not have implemented earned discharge or administrative sanctions, or created the best practices fund. Perhaps most important, the legislation makes it clear that state policymakers are measuring agency performance and expect results.



## Conclusion

**T**hese results provide a snapshot of a dynamic field. The profiles of activity in Arkansas, South Dakota, and Tennessee illustrate how much parole practices were changing at the time of the survey and how much they have continued to change. It seems fair to say that what we see in the snapshot is a field that has embraced evidence-based practice in principle, with states moving to implement a number of sound behavior change practices, and great progress made in risk/needs assessment. Each state has a unique mix of strengths and weaknesses in its parole practices relative to other states. Even within states, findings reflect differences in practice and in interpretation of consistent practice. Resolving such differences in favor of effective parole practices is an implementation challenge, and the survey may have found many states in the middle of an implementation process.

The survey results suggest a different story in each state. Different patterns in practice gaps likely indicate different underlying challenges and necessitate different approaches to remedying them:

- *Systems approaches are required to change many practices.* The survey was administered to the field office of the agency (or agencies) responsible for parole supervision in each state, but changing the practices discussed here might not

be the sole responsibility of the parole supervision agency. For example, tailoring conditions of supervision will require the cooperation of the releasing authority, and implementing earned discharge could require changes in sentencing or state law. Within a supervision agency, the focus for changing practice will be at the agency policy level in some cases; at disseminating practice to field offices in others; and at ensuring that a practice is understood, embraced, and carried out at the line level in still others. Moving in the direction of effective parole practice is likely to require engaging institutional corrections, field supervision, the releasing authority, state policymakers, and other key stakeholders to develop a unified systems approach to facilitating reentry and supervision success.

- *Where uncertainty exists, clear communication and training are necessary.* Integrating new concepts into supervision is a continuous process of training and messaging. In areas where the survey found much uncertainty regarding concepts and practices (such as those relative to EBPs), additional efforts to ensure that field supervisors understand the concept and how it applies to them will increase uptake. Resolving differences in interpretation and understanding of practice requires training, consistent messaging, and clear communication from agency leadership.
- *Barriers may exist to implementing motivation enhancement techniques.* In most states, techniques to enhance parolee motivation—such as involving them in case planning and motivational interviewing—are not prevalent. The question is why these practices are not widespread in states that want to incorporate them. It could be that parole leadership has not emphasized them, that line officers need to develop new skills to apply them, or that officer time needs to be freed from other workload requirements or large caseloads.

The results of the Parole Practice Survey at both the national and state levels are a starting point in understanding parole practice. Efforts to gather information about parole supervision practice must continue, to help policymakers, parole leaders, and other stakeholders gauge where they stand, what progress had been made, and what remains to be done to advance the challenging but essential field of parole supervision.



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## SURVEYING THE FIELD

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# Appendix A

## *Parole Practice Survey Results by State*

State (response rate)	Tailors parole conditions to individual parolee	Concentrates resources at point of release	Provides incentives for meeting supervision goals	Allows earned discharge	Uses risk/needs assessment instrument	Focuses resources on high-risk parolees
All Offices (48%)	2.25	80%	71%	52%	3.31	94%
Alabama (21%)	1.58	85%	77%	58%	3.67	92%
Alaska (54%)	2.33	43%	57%	43%	3.86	100%
Arizona (83%)	3.67	93%	40%	0%	3.67	100%
Arkansas (92%)	1.45	93%	95%	30%	3.44	98%
California (37%)	3.63	90%	72%	93%	3.03	92%
Connecticut (50%)	4.00	100%	100%	0%	3.50	100%
Delaware (100%)	2.60	40%	60%	60%	4.00	100%
Georgia (71%)	2.17	94%	83%	86%	3.61	97%
Hawaii (60%)	1.67	100%	100%	100%	3.33	100%
Illinois (42%)	3.00	9%	100%	100%	1.00	100%
Indiana (75%)	2.67	83%	67%	0%	3.67	100%
Iowa (30%)	2.45	73%	64%	64%	3.82	82%
Kentucky (53%)	2.10	90%	90%	50%	3.44	90%
Louisiana (65%)	1.92	77%	62%	0%	3.75	100%
Maine (75%)	2.33	33%	33%	33%	4.00	100%
Maryland (60%)	1.52	63%	83%	42%	3.19	92%
Massachusetts (63%)	2.00	80%	20%	0%	2.00	100%
Michigan (54%)	2.74	91%	57%	91%	3.35	93%
Minnesota (22%)	2.47	82%	65%	0%	3.59	100%
Missouri (76%)	1.39	74%	57%	63%	3.13	95%
Montana (64%)	2.29	86%	93%	36%	3.07	86%
Nebraska (71%)	2.50	20%	40%	0%	2.20	60%
New Mexico (41%)	2.10	91%	64%	45%	3.89	91%
North Carolina (29%)	1.00	67%	58%	8%	3.58	75%
Ohio (53%)	3.30	80%	90%	80%	4.00	90%
Oklahoma (67%)	3.00	100%	100%	100%	4.00	100%
Oregon (71%)	2.38	82%	73%	45%	2.76	100%
Pennsylvania (59%)	2.20	64%	64%	34%	2.28	93%
South Carolina (80%)	1.51	84%	78%	8%	3.52	97%
South Dakota (100%)	2.90	89%	100%	100%	4.00	100%
Tennessee (71%)	1.40	68%	75%	7%	3.27	72%
Texas (23%)	2.00	79%	57%	86%	3.31	100%
Virginia (79%)	1.09	79%	82%	68%	3.45	97%
Washington (58%)	2.45	83%	69%	21%	3.79	97%
Wisconsin (34%)	3.00	88%	79%	58%	3.37	94%
Wyoming (43%)	2.44	78%	67%	89%	3.89	100%

Scaled items scored according to the following scale: never = 0, some of the time = 1, about half the time = 2, most of the time = 3, always = 4  
\*\*Excluded because it did not meet the response rate for inclusion.



State (response rate)	Parolee plays							
	Supervision incorporates treatment needs	role in supervision goals and plans	Uses motivational interviewing	Involves parolee social supports	Assigns officers by geographic area	Tracks recidivism of current parolees	Tracks recidivism of former parolees	Uses sanctioning grid or guidelines
All Offices (48%)	3.23	2.04	1.57	1.78	63%	74%	23%	60%
Alabama (21%)	2.82	1.38	1.27	2.08	23%	77%	33%	42%
Alaska (54%)	3.57	1.29	2.00	1.29	14%	14%	0%	43%
Arizona (83%)	2.93	1.00	1.40	0.87	80%	100%	0%	100%
Arkansas (92%)	3.44	2.32	2.36	1.41	50%	95%	20%	69%
California (37%)	3.03	1.54	1.06	2.52	73%	78%	10%	39%
Connecticut (50%)	3.50	3.50	1.00	0.50	100%	100%	0%	100%
Delaware (100%)	4.00	2.50	0.75	1.20	40%	40%	0%	0%
Georgia (71%)	3.63	2.26	1.75	2.20	77%	94%	20%	79%
Hawaii (60%)	3.00	1.67	3.00	2.00	67%	67%	0%	33%
Illinois (42%)	1.27	0.91	0.00	1.00	91%	100%	100%	100%
Indiana (75%)	3.33	3.17	2.83	2.67	83%	67%	60%	83%
Iowa (30%)	3.36	3.64	3.18	1.36	64%	80%	38%	40%
Kentucky (53%)	3.20	1.56	1.00	1.10	60%	80%	40%	56%
Louisiana (65%)	3.46	2.92	0.75	2.15	92%	69%	29%	42%
Maine (75%)	3.33	2.67	3.33	1.00	67%	100%	33%	0%
Maryland (60%)	3.22	1.86	2.70	1.48	83%	67%	0%	29%
Massachusetts (63%)	3.40	0.80	**	1.60	60%	100%	60%	**
Michigan (54%)	3.02	2.28	1.00	2.24	30%	80%	0%	98%
Minnesota (22%)	3.24	2.18	2.06	2.35	53%	75%	31%	81%
Missouri (76%)	3.17	2.78	1.62	1.71	57%	88%	33%	65%
Montana (64%)	3.64	1.71	1.85	1.86	57%	79%	0%	20%
Nebraska (71%)	2.00	1.80	1.60	1.40	20%	75%	100%	25%
New Mexico (41%)	3.82	2.82	2.73	2.00	18%	40%	25%	50%
North Carolina (29%)	3.45	2.91	1.30	1.91	77%	69%	0%	31%
Ohio (53%)	3.30	1.80	0.78	2.10	60%	90%	29%	100%
Oklahoma (67%)	4.00	3.67	3.00	3.00	75%	100%	33%	33%
Oregon (71%)	3.32	2.19	2.32	1.82	43%	90%	65%	95%
Pennsylvania (59%)	3.20	1.80	0.76	1.20	59%	50%	2%	21%
South Carolina (80%)	3.28	1.03	0.83	1.25	70%	51%	7%	65%
South Dakota (100%)	3.80	1.40	3.70	1.20	70%	40%	0%	100%
Tennessee (71%)	3.00	1.61	1.32	1.48	55%	72%	8%	33%
Texas (23%)	2.79	1.07	0.82	1.77	67%	73%	14%	92%
Virginia (79%)	3.52	3.30	1.19	1.73	70%	59%	28%	62%
Washington (58%)	3.31	1.63	1.43	2.31	86%	79%	55%	96%
Wisconsin (34%)	3.44	1.75	1.25	1.91	85%	50%	16%	67%
Wyoming (43%)	3.78	3.00	1.00	1.89	44%	78%	75%	11%







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