

2009 Innovations Awards Program APPLICATION

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ID # (assigned by CSG): 09-E-05NJ

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: New Jersey

Assign Program Category: Public Safety/Corrections

1. Program Name

Regional Assessment Centers

2. Administering Agency

New Jersey State Parole Board

3. Contact Person (Name and Title)

Joseph M. Shields – Executive Director, New Jersey State Parole Board

4. Address

171 Jersey Street, Building 2, Trenton, NJ 08625

5. Telephone Number

609.984.6100

6. FAX Number

609.984.2188

7. E-mail Address

Joseph.Shields@spb.state.nj.us

8. Web site Address

www.state.nj.us/parole/

9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.

Regional Assessment Centers (RACs) are clinically-based programs that hold technical parole violators to a 15- to 30-day lockdown period, while subjecting them to a scientific assessment that helps the State Parole Board determine whether the technical violator should be continued on parole with intensified supervision or treatment; or whether the individual should be returned to prison. The RAC is unique in that it allows the State Parole Board to use its law enforcement and hearing authorities as a first stage for intervention and treatment of parolees who are at risk of committing new crimes and threatening public safety.

10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 2, 2009 to be considered.

The program was fully operational as of July 1st, 2008.

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

The RAC was developed as an investment in public safety, and a method to save taxpayer dollars by reducing the rate at which technical parole violators are returned to prison. Technical parole violators are parolees who have committed a technical violation of the conditions of their supervision, but have not been charged with a new crime or significantly threatened public safety. Most technical violations are consistent with a relapse in addiction, and indicate intensified supervision and treatment as an appropriate response for public safety. In New Jersey and nationwide, researchers and practitioners have recognized that the re-incarceration of low-level technical violators creates unnecessary costs without a corresponding benefit to public safety. The RAC assessment, on the other hand, prevents the costs of re-incarceration while enhancing the State Parole Board's use of evidence-based supervision as a tool to reduce recidivism and help these parolees successfully reenter society.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

The RAC strategy begins when a parole officer determines that a parolee has persistently violated the conditions of supervision. The officer initiates the parole revocation process by issuing a warrant for violation of parole, and arrests the parolee. Prior to the creation of the RAC, parolees accused of a technical violation would be held in a county jail for several weeks, to await a parole revocation hearing. The RAC allows for a much more productive use of the time between the arrest and the parole revocation hearing. Upon arrest, the parolee is transported to one of two privately run RAC facilities, for a lockdown and clinical evaluation period that will last 15 to 30 days. The parolee is subjected to a barrage of clinical risk and need assessments during this period. The assessments include a range of criminogenic factors including mental health and social, familial and economic needs.

Special attention is provided to individuals who present symptomatic needs, indicating a need for medical stabilization for alcohol or illicit drug addiction. Such individuals are further evaluated using a series of drug and alcohol screens and nursing assessments. When appropriate they are admitted into a medical stabilization area, separate from the rest of the RAC facility. Medical stabilization includes detoxification and medications appropriate to the individual. After medical stabilization, the parolee is moved into a RAC bed.

The 15- to 30-day lockdown and assessment at the RAC is followed by a parole revocation hearing. This hearing is conducted by a parole revocation hearing officer who is thoroughly informed of the scientific assessments used to evaluate the parolee at the RAC. The RAC data helps the State Parole Board make more effective decisions as to whether the technical violator should be continued on parole, and how that continued supervision should take place. The RAC findings help the State Parole

Board decide whether the parolee should be subject to specific forms of intensified supervision (such as electronic monitoring and a curfew), or specialized reentry programs in the community (such as substance abuse treatment). RAC information can also lead to a decision to return the parolee to prison.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

The RAC is a unique public safety strategy. It allows the State Parole Board to use its law enforcement authority as an early intervention for parolees whose behavior is problematic but has not yet escalated to include new crimes. Prior to the development of the RAC, approximately 66 percent of the parole population revoked for technical reasons, was revoked due to issues related to addiction and relapse. The reasons for revocation included failing drug tests, refusing drug tests, using or possessing drugs, and not reporting to a parole officer.

Prior to the creation of the RAC, the State Parole Board's resources were not efficient for responding to these issues. Decision-makers at a parole revocation hearing were able to rely on the parole officers' evidence of the problematic behavior, the parolee's explanations or refutation of that evidence, and risk/needs assessments that were conducted prior to the emergence of the relapse-related behaviors. However, the RAC assessment adds scientific data specifically related to the problem behaviors at hand, collected at the time those behaviors manifested. This allows for better-informed decisions regarding continued supervision and treatment, or incarceration.

The use of such information has been found to decrease prison populations by increasing the rate of continuing parole supervision. It has also been found to increase positive outcomes for these individuals when they reenter society.

The RAC saves taxpayer dollars by diverting parolees away from county jail during the period between the arrest and the revocation hearing. Because the State Parole Board directly controls the RAC, it is the SPB alone – not the Department of Corrections or county jail – that determines the time frame for the parolee's lockdown while awaiting the revocation hearing.

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

The RAC was funded in FY 09 at the amount of \$4.5 million. This figure includes \$1.7 million for officer salaries and related equipment, and \$2.8 million for assessment and treatment beds.

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

Initial funding, for FY 09, was \$4.5 million. The Governor's Budget Recommendation proposed FY 10 funding at \$4.6 million, representing a slight increase in annual costs.

16. How is the program funded?

The RAC is annually funded within Direct State Services, State Parole Board, Division of Parole appropriations. The appropriation line item is referenced as the Parole Violator and Assessment and Treatment Program.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

This program did NOT require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

The RAC is connected to the Parole Board Information System (PBIS), developed and maintained by the State Parole Board. PBIS tracks hundreds of thousands of offenders through the parole system and the larger criminal justice system. It stores the information needed to conduct hearings on inmates and parolees. It allows parole officers to keep chronological notes on a parolee's behavior in the community. It allows staff to identify the specific reentry programs a parolee has been referred to, and learn about the parolee's performance in those programs.

The technology used to administer the RAC also includes the private contractor's internal tracking/data system.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

YES, the RAC initiative originated in the State of New Jersey. It was made possible through a collaboration between the New Jersey State Parole Board's executive staff and the Government Efficiency and Reform (GEAR) Commission. The GEAR Commission is a team of policy and criminal justice experts from the public and private sector, appointed by Governor Jon S. Corzine. It is charged with analyzing all sectors of government to find areas where improvements can be made to increase positive outcomes for at-risk populations and to realize greater system-wide cost effectiveness. The State Parole Board worked with the GEAR Commission's Sentencing/Corrections Task Force, led by former New Jersey Supreme Court Chief Justice Deborah T. Poritz. State Parole Board Executive Director Joseph M. Shields served on the GEAR Commission as the State Parole Board's representative.

Joseph M. Shields
Executive Director, New Jersey State Parole Board
171 Jersey Street
Trenton, NJ 08625
Office Phone: 609.984.6100

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

NO. This program is unique to the state of New Jersey.

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

YES. This program has been fully implemented.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

With the advent of the RAC, the State Parole Board has witnessed remarkable increases in the rate of parolees who are continued on parole (with appropriately intensified supervision or programming) after being charged with a technical violation. Since inception, RAC programs have continued parole for 51 percent of the population that enters the program. Only 46 percent of RAC participants have ultimately had their parole revoked (the remaining 3 percent are pending decisions).

These rates contrast greatly with those of the general parole population before the inception of the RAC. Before the RAC's inception, only 19 percent of the State Parole Board's general population was continued on parole. About 81 percent were revoked and sent back to county jails and state prisons.

These changes indicate that the RAC is working as a tool for reentry and public safety. Those responsible for making decisions about technical parole violators, are now armed with scientific and actuarially based information about each parolee's problem behaviors. The decision makers are therefore better informed about the individual parolees' risks and needs. This has resulted in connecting more parolees with intensified supervision and appropriate reentry programs.

The RAC has also led to a greater utilization of existing, residential addiction treatment resources. Parole officers have begun referring parolees to RAC medical stabilization beds prior to charging them with a violation – rather than using the medical stabilization bed after the onset of revocation proceedings and as an initial stage in the RAC lockdown and assessment period. This unexpected and creative use of RAC resources has not conflicted with the functions of the RAC. Instead it has resulted in medical stabilization treatment for an additional 755 parolees who were exhibiting problem behaviors, effectively diverting them from county jails and ultimately from state prisons. With the inclusion of these diversions and based off of predictive data through June 2009, the RAC is estimated to save the state approximately \$15 million in the first fiscal year since its inception. This figure represents an actual cost-effectiveness six times greater than what was proposed to the Governor during the planning phase of this initiative.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

Use of the RAC has exceeded initial expectations. As a result, the State Parole Board has increased the capacity by 20 percent, from 45 beds to 54. To support this change, the State Parole Board has increased its communication with the private vendor that runs the facilities, and has ensured a constant level of oversight.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

Other states should take note of a number of obstacles the State Parole Board encountered during development and implementation of the RAC. These included custodial regulations, potential union issues, contractual processes, private vendor vs. public entity service provision issues, and cost considerations. Monetary costs were especially apparent at startup and recur as implementation continues.

2009 Innovations Awards Program Program Categories and Subcategories

Use these as guidelines to determine the appropriate Program Category for your state's submission and list that program category on page one of this application. Choose only one.

Infrastructure and Economic Development

- Business/Commerce
- Economic Development
- Transportation

Government Operations

- Administration
- Elections
- Public Information
- Revenue

Health & Human Services

- Aging
- Children & Families
- Health Services
- Housing
- Human Services

Human Resources/Education

- Education
- Labor
- Management
- Personnel
- Training and Development
- Workforce Development

Natural Resources

- Agriculture
- Energy
- Environment
- Environmental Protection
- Natural Resources
- Parks & Recreation
- Water Resources

Public Safety/Corrections

- Corrections
- Courts
- Criminal Justice
- Drugs
- Emergency Management
- Public Safety

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CSG Innovations Awards 2009
The Council of State Governments
2760 Research Park Drive, P.O. Box 11910
Lexington, KY 40578-1910

Contact:

Nancy J. Vickers, National Program Administrator
Phone: 859.244.8105
Fax: 859.244.8001 – Attn: Innovations Awards Program
The Council of State Governments
E-mail: nvickers@csg.org

This application is also available at www.csg.org, in the Programs section.

Deadline: March 2, 2009