

The Multi-site Evaluation of the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative

Sustaining Adult Reentry Programming after SVORI

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In 2003, the US DOJ, DOL, ED, DHUD, and DHHS funded 69 agencies to implement reentry programs for prisoners. The SVORI funding has supported 89 programs nationwide that are being evaluated by RTI International and the Urban Institute.

The Multi-site Evaluation team provides succinct and practical information on SVORI programs and interim evaluation findings through our *Reentry Research in Action* (RRIA) series of topical briefs. In this brief, we report the views of the program directors of *adult* programs regarding the systems changes that have occurred through SVORI. We also describe their plans for continuing elements of reentry programming begun under SVORI, and we present the mechanisms they identified as necessary to take reentry programming “to scale.”

Beginning in the mid-1990s, policy makers began to focus on how to improve the reentry process so that fewer offenders return to prison. One of the first federal programs offered to support reentry innovation in the states—the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI)—was designed not to be a new program, but rather to allow states to fill gaps in existing efforts and create linkages to services and programming. The recipients of SVORI grants were to develop a locally responsive initiative that included assessments, case management, and enhancements to both in-prison and post-release services; however, the specific attributes of the SVORI initiative were left to the grantees. Thus, SVORI is

best understood as a funding stream to support reentry programming rather than as an intervention of a specific program model.

The 69 SVORI grantees developed 89 SVORI programs. The initial grant award period ended June 2006; however, 66 programs requested and received no-cost extensions, allowing them to continue operations for up to 1 year. The vast majority of SVORI grants will end by July 2007. Now that this funding stream is ending, it is important to understand whether gains in reentry programming made under SVORI will be maintained.

In 2005, the research team conducting the Multi-site Evaluation of SVORI asked all 89 program directors (PDs) whether they planned to continue or expand their SVORI programs once federally provided SVORI funds had been expended (see *Sustainability of SVORI Programs Reentry Research in Action*, December 2005). At that time, almost all PDs (95%) reported planning to continue or expand SVORI, and 88% reported that the political climate in their communities was favorable to reentry programming.

In 2006, the research team surveyed the PDs again. This second survey provided an opportunity to determine whether the PDs believed that systems change had occurred through SVORI, and to ask whether perceptions regarding sustainability persisted as the initial SVORI funding ended. This *Reentry Research in Action* brief presents results from the adult SVORI programs (51 out of 52 programs responding) and includes PDs’ perceptions of systems changes, sustainability strategies that will be used to keep reentry programming in place, the specific components that will be maintained, and the factors that are seen as essential to bring reentry programming “to scale” in the states. This information provides for an understanding of the degree to which federal funding can lead to changes in key processes and whether those changes are likely to be maintained.

Systems Change

The PDs were asked to describe the most significant organizational or systems-level changes that occurred as a result of SVORI. In response to this open-ended question, the PDs of adult programs reported successes in four main areas: (1) collaboration and coordination, (2) practice, (3) philosophy, and (4) expansion and support. Although most PDs identified one or more specific systems-level changes, some could not: six PDs left the question blank, admitted that there have been no lasting changes, or provided vague answers (Exhibit 1).

The most frequently mentioned systems-level changes related to collaboration and coordination, primarily the development and continuation of reentry partnerships among the organizations providing services. Additionally, several PDs talked about the creation of a unified system or improved coordination of service delivery, and a few

Exhibit 1. Systems-Level Changes Attributed to SVORI	Adult Programs (N = 51)
Collaboration/coordination	24
Partnerships, agency collaboration	17
Establishment of a unified system	2
Coordination of service delivery	3
Resource sharing	2
Practices	16
Permanent change in policies/procedures	10
Begin reentry planning at entry	4
New technologies implemented	2
Philosophy	14
Culture change ("the way we do business")	4
Change in focus/awareness	6
Establishment of common mission/goals	4
Expansion/support	14
Program expansion (statewide; criteria)	6
New reentry partnerships/initiatives established	3
Legislative support	5
No obvious systems-level changes	6

specifically mentioned efficiencies created through resource sharing.

The PDs also identified lasting changes to practices, policies, and procedures. Some described very specific changes to policies that had served as barriers (e.g., allowing community service providers to work with incarcerated participants), while others described more general institutional changes directed at facilitating reentry, the most common being planning for release at intake. Two PDs mentioned that technologies such as videoconferencing systems, implemented as part of SVORI, are being maintained.

The philosophical changes mentioned by the PDs include a culture change in how participating organizations do business. Further, they described an organizational change in "focus" and "awareness" on reentry. Several specifically mentioned the establishment of common cross-agency goals, missions, and terminology, all related to reentry.

Finally, the PDs described expansion of the program and new reentry partnerships or initiatives that were built on SVORI efforts as evidence of systems change. They also listed increasing legislative support as evidence of systems change. Thus, although not all adult PDs reported comprehensive systems changes, the types of changes some reported are evidence that important advances have been made in a number of sites.

Sustainability Strategies

We also asked the PDs to identify specific activities they used when developing sustainability strategies; their responses are displayed in Exhibit 2. Although approximately one-third of the 51 adult programs indicated that they would pursue additional funding (ranging from 25% who pursued private funding to 39% who pursued federal funding [data not shown]), the most frequently used strategies reported by the PDs are activities that do not depend on funding. These strategies include determining the degree to which goals have been met and assessing resource needs, reaching out to various partners to convene meetings, and extending formal working relationships.

Exhibit 2. Sustainability Strategies	Adult Programs (N = 51)
Assessed progress achieved with original goals	47
Assessed resource needs	46
Sought out other partnering agencies	43
Held sustainability planning meetings	41
Continued MOAs with partnering agencies	39
Cross-trained staff	35
Developed sustainability plan	33
Reallocated resources in grantee agency	28
Reallocated resources across partners	19

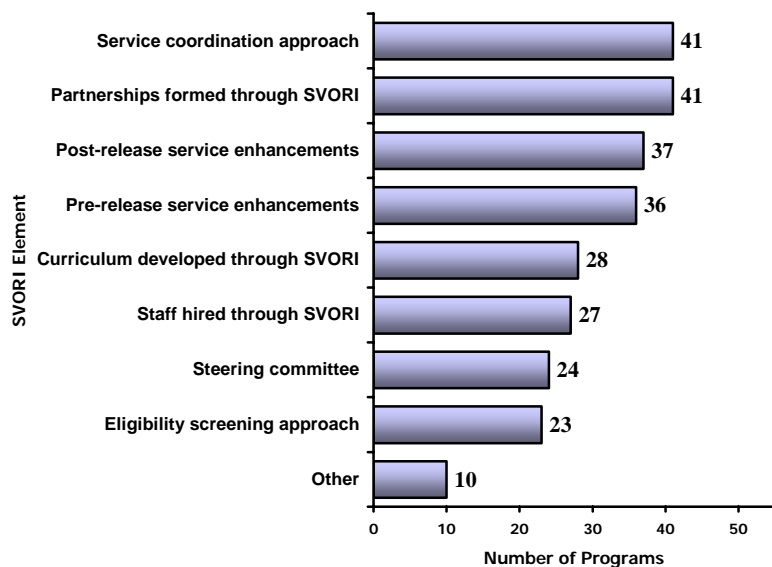
Note: MOA = Memoranda of Agreement

Elements Being Sustained

We asked the PDs to identify the elements of SVORI that they planned to continue (Exhibit 3). Ninety-two percent of the programs planned to continue at least some elements of SVORI once SVORI funds were no longer available. The element most frequently mentioned to be retained was the approach to service coordination. In the 2005 PD survey, at least three-fourths of the PDs identified use of a boundary spanner (defined in the survey as a specific staff person whose responsibility it is to create and maintain cross-agency linkages) and a wrap-around approach (defined in the survey as a suite of services available to both an offender and his or her family) as the service coordination approach that had been enhanced by SVORI. Many PDs also reported that they would sustain the partnerships formed with other agencies.

In addition, many PDs planned to retain *pre-release* service enhancements made through SVORI. Although the 2006 survey did not ask the PDs to identify the specific services that would be retained, the survey did ask which pre-release services were either newly implemented or enhanced through SVORI. Mentioned by at least two-

Exhibit 3. SVORI Elements That PDs Plan to Retain (N = 51)



thirds of the PDs were needs assessments, the use of reentry teams, the development of treatment plans, case management, and in-person contacts prior to release. Further, we examined the 2005 survey data to identify the specific services received by a greater proportion of SVORI participants than comparable, non-SVORI offenders. We define a service as “enhanced” if there was at least a 20% difference in these proportions and at least 75% of the SVORI participants received the service. Using the 2005 PD data, these enhanced pre-release services include release plan development, resume and interviewing skills development, and life skills training.

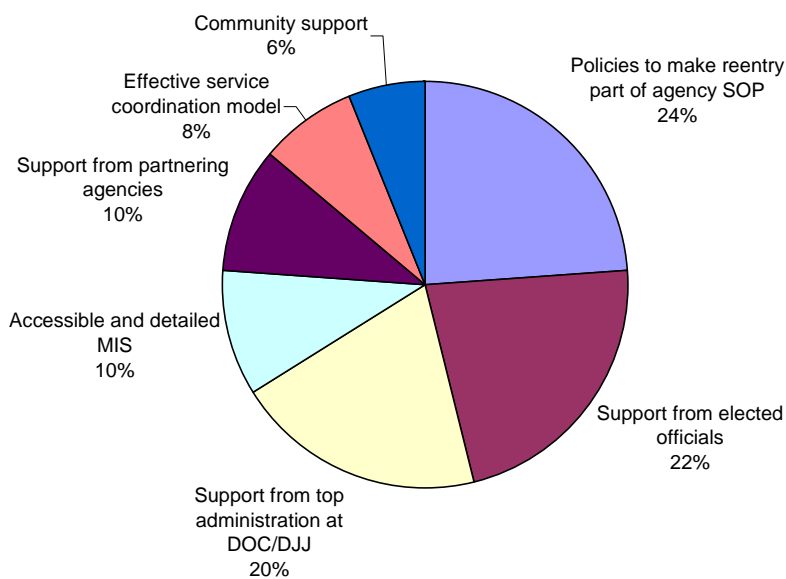
Similarly, PDs frequently reported plans to maintain *post-release* service

enhancements. At least two-thirds of PDs said the newly implemented or enhanced post-release services were treatment plan development and case management. Additionally, PDs stated that some employment-related post-release services were newly implemented or enhanced; specifically, interviewing skills, resume development, and employment referrals. Finally, PDs reported that several post-release transition services were newly implemented or enhanced (i.e., obtaining benefits, transportation support, and housing placements). When examining differences in the proportions of offenders receiving services, as reported in 2005, PDs reported that the post-release services that were enhanced included needs assessments, release plan development, and employment referrals/job placements. Thus, not only do the PDs report that they will maintain various components of pre- and post-release services, they have identified the services clearly and there is consistency over time in the service components mentioned (2005 and 2006 data both indicate enhancements in assessments, treatment plans and case management, assessments, and employment services).

Going to Scale

Finally, we asked the PDs to identify the *primary* factor necessary to take reentry programming to scale in their states (i.e., make programming available to all offenders) (Exhibit 4). When asked about factors other than funding, the most frequently chosen was the development of policies that would make reentry programming part of the agency’s standard operating procedure (SOP) (cited by 12 PDs), closely followed by support from elected state officials (cited by 11 PDs), and support from the top administration at DOC/DJJ (cited by 11 PDs).

Exhibit 4. Most Important Strategy to Take SVORI to Scale



MIS = Management Information System; SOP = standard operating procedure.

In conclusion, although the SVORI funding stream is ending, the institutionalization of many key elements has apparently begun in many states. State-level examples are shown in Exhibit 5. Although sites continue to seek additional funding, PDs reported increased systems integration as a change that is underway. They reported that their agencies have a commitment to continuing the approach to service coordination and interagency partnerships, as well as to service enhancements. Conversely, PDs reported that they were unlikely to continue the steering committees established for SVORI or to provide support for SVORI-specific staffing. Finally, they see changing SOPs as key to taking reentry programming to scale.

Exhibit 5. State-Level Examples of Systems Change and Sustainability Outcomes

Systems Change

California Department of Corrections: The agency now has the ability for “Going Home Los Angeles” to integrate several separate systems into one to ensure the participant’s smooth and seamless transition into the community.

Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS): The improved collaboration between DMHAS, DOC, and parole and probation has resulted in better discharge planning for inmates with mental illness. It also has increased appreciation for missions/goals across state agencies.

New Mexico Corrections Department: A statewide approach to reentry planning has encompassed a joint effort between correctional facilities and probation and parole. New Mexico’s Corrections Department reentry initiative also has been merged with the state’s Behavioral Health Collaborative initiative.

Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction: According to the PD, the most significant change is the level of coordination and cooperation among state agencies. A number of new initiatives have begun as a result of these partnerships.

Sustainability

Idaho Department of Corrections: Due, in part, to the agency’s experience with SVORI, the Idaho State Legislature appropriated funds for a statewide reentry effort. This effort has wrapped around SVORI and the state is now delivering reentry services to all offender age groups.

Nevada Department of Corrections: According to the PD, reentry did not exist in the state prior to SVORI. SVORI enabled the agency to develop the necessary framework and infrastructure to continue reentry efforts beyond SVORI.

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