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

Characteristics of Prisoner Reentry Programs

By Laura Winterfield, *Urban Institute,* and Christine Lindquist, *RTI International*   July 2005

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

In this *Reentry Research in Action* brief, we describe the SVORI programs along various dimensions that characterize their areas of emphasis. Findings are based on data gathered from a June 2005 survey of the SVORI program directors.

The Federal SVORI funding consortium believed that individual states were better positioned than the Federal government to determine the particular elements of a reentry initiative that would most appropriately fit their individual offender needs and organizational resources. Thus, the various state-level activities being operated under SVORI funding are not intended to be viewed as a traditional treatment "program" with specific components dictated by an a priori model. This report describes the SVORI programs along various dimensions that characterize their areas of emphasis, based on data gathered from a June 2005 survey of the SVORI program directors for all 89 programs[1]. Table 1 summarizes the SVORI programs along key organizational characteristics.

As shown in the table, most (64%) program directors reported that the post-release phase of reentry programming is run primarily by a government agency rather than a private one, although staff from both types of agencies are likely to be involved. Additionally, most program directors reported using program funds to "fill service gaps" or "expand an existing program" rather than to "develop new programming."

Table 1. Characteristics of SVORI Programs

Characteristic	Programs	
	n	%
Main Post-release Agency Type		
Government agency	57	64.0%
Private agency	25	28.1%
Primary Use of SVORI Funds		
Starting a new program	21	23.6%
Expanding an existing program	25	28.1%
Filling service gaps	36	40.4%
Phase Emphasis		
Pre-release	3	3.4%
Post-release	20	22.5%
Both	60	67.4%
Pre-release Geographic Targeting		
All facilities	36	40.4%
Select facilities only	46	51.7%
Post-release Geographic Targeting		
All communities (statewide)	8	9.0%
Select communities only	75	84.3%
Offender Needs Targeting		
General "serious and violent" population	71	79.8%
Subset of offenders with specific service needs	10	11.2%
Other	2	2.2%
Service Targeting		
Attempt to provide all needed services for participants	73	82.0%
Focus on a specific type of service or set of services	10	11.2%

Note: Percentages reported in this table are percentages of all (89) SVORI programs and do not sum to 100 because of missing data.

---

[1] The 69 SVORI grantees are operating a total of 89 distinct programs. The multi-site evaluation describes characteristics at the program level rather than the grantee level.

Consistent with the intent of SVORI to develop services and programming within the institution and the community to span three phases—institutional, supervised post-release, and post-supervision—most of the program directors reported that their programs did not focus primarily on either the institutional or the community phase but emphasized both.

An important characteristic of the SVORI programs is the extent to which each program chose to target pre-release resources on individuals in a few or all institutions and post-release programming on those returning to a few or all communities statewide. Most grantees reported that their SVORI program is geographically restricted. Slightly more than half have implemented SVORI in selected correctional institutions, and most have targeted specific communities of return.

Regarding the target population for SVORI services, program directors reported that, in general, they serve the serious and violent offender population as a whole as opposed to serving a subset of offenders with specific service needs. Additionally, rather than focusing service provision on a particular set of offender needs, they mostly reported attempting to provide all needed services.

The three service-need areas most often ranked as the number one priority were employment, community integration, and family support/unification (see Table 2). Other services that were frequently ranked in the top three include substance abuse treatment and education/skills building. Given that the literature supports the importance of work, integration into family and community, and decreased substance use as key factors influencing successful reentry, the programmatic foci seem not only appropriate but encouraging.

Top service-need areas:
- Employment
- Community integration
- Family support/unification

Table 2. Primary Focus of SVORI Programs

| Service Type | All Programs | | | | |
| | Any Rank | | Top Rank | | Mean |
	n	%	n	%	
Employment/vocation	57	64.0%	24	27.0%	2.12
Community integration	44	49.4%	24	27.0%	2.25
Substance abuse	43	48.0%	9	10.0%	1.88
Education/skills building	36	40.4%	6	6.7%	1.78
Mental health	23	25.8%	6	6.7%	1.87
Family support/unification	25	28.0%	10	11.0%	2.12
Other	15	17.0%	2	2.2%	1.67
Physical health	0	n/a	0	n/a	n/a

Note: This table shows the results of a question asking program directors to rank the top three areas on which they are focusing their programs and services. Results are based on the 83 returned surveys. "Any Rank" means service was included in programs' list of top three services. "Top Rank" means service was identified as programs' top priority. "Mean" is the mean rank score for each service type (with "3" ranked highest)—a higher score indicates a larger number of high rankings.

Multi-site Evaluation of SVORI Principal Investigators

Pamela K. Lattimore, Ph.D.
RTI International
Center for Crime, Violence, and Justice Research
3040 Cornwallis Road
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709
Phone: 803-754-5965
Fax: 919-485-7700

Christy A. Visher, Ph.D.
Urban Institute
Justice Policy Center
2100 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
Phone: 202-261-5593
Fax: 202-659-8985

www.svori-evaluation.org