

# Sonoma County: Adult Community Supervision Process Evaluation

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## Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction .....	7
Population Overview.....	12
Findings .....	14
Organizational Culture and Communication .....	14
Navigating the Dual Roles and Responsibilities .....	19
Client Engagement.....	23
Behavior Response.....	30
Programs and Services .....	34
Recommendations .....	39



# Executive Summary

## Background and Context

California Assembly Bill 109 (AB 109) is the cornerstone of the state’s legislative efforts to reduce the prison population and close the revolving door of justice system involvement for individuals convicted of non-violent, non-serious, and non-sexual offenses. In 2016, the Sonoma County Community Corrections Partnership (CCP) contracted Resource Development Associates (RDA) to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation, effectiveness, and costs associated with AB 109 realignment. Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 – 2021 marks the fourth year of the evaluation.

## Evaluation Overview

This evaluation focuses on the alignment of the Sonoma County Probation Department (Department) with best and evidence-based practices for adult community supervision. Through evaluation planning and qualitative and quantitative data collection, RDA identified the following five areas as most salient to the Department:

1. Organizational Culture and Communication
2. Navigating the Dual Roles and Responsibilities of Probation Officers
3. Client Engagement
4. Behavior Response
5. Programs and Services

For each area, this report describes best and evidence-based practices, assesses the Department’s alignment with these practices, and provide recommendations to strengthen alignment.

### Evaluation Questions

- 1) To what extent has the Probation Department adopted promising and evidence-based practices in adult community supervision in its policies and procedures?
- 2) To what extent has the Probation Department implemented promising and evidence-based practices in adult community supervision?
- 3) To what extent does the Probation Department environment support the use of promising and evidence-based practices in adult community supervision?

### Key Data Sources

- Probation client demographics, risk and needs assessment results, caseloads, case plans, training attendance, and client contacts and sanctions
- Client survey
- Focus groups and interviews with staff from Probation Department spanning management, supervisors, line staff, and non-sworn staff
- Focus groups and interview with the Sheriff’s Office, Human Services Department, Public Defender’s Office, District Attorney’s Office, Superior Court Behavioral Health, community-based organizations
- Focus groups and interviews with probation clients



## Key Evaluation Findings

### Organizational Culture and Communication

- **Strategic plan.** The Probation Department's 2018-2020 Strategic Plan emphasized the Department's commitment to evidence-based practices (EBPs) and identified goals and strategies related to EPBs, internal capacity and effectiveness, and collaboration with partners and community. The Department has made some progress achieving these goals, but many areas still require focused attention.
- **Internal communication and morale.** Communication challenges contribute to low morale and a sentiment from line staff that their experiences and feedback are not valued or prioritized. Variations in how information is disseminated from management to line staff can lead to confusion in top-down communication.
- **External communication.** While justice agencies report strong, effective collaboration with Probation, there are opportunities for more structured interdepartmental coordination across the County.

### Navigating the Dual Roles and Responsibilities

- **Staff capacity.** As probation officers' roles and responsibilities have expanded over time, staff find it challenging to fulfill their many duties.
- **Navigating roles.** While the Probation Department expects and encourages probation officers to take on responsibilities related to law enforcement and behavior change, probation officers require more guidance to navigate these roles effectively.

### Client Engagement

- **Use of EBPs.** Despite organizational commitment and a concerted focus on EBP implementation, there is limited buy-in across the organization for tools that support the RNR model, including the Offender Needs Assessment, case planning, and the Effective Practices in Community Supervision model.
- **Probation officers' approaches.** Probation officer approaches and styles vary, which can lead to inconsistent client experiences. While some clients reported collaborative and supportive relationships with their supervising probation officer, others emphasized a lack of engagement and empathy.

### Behavior Response

- **Response grids.** The Department does not have tools to consistently respond to compliance and noncompliance. A Responses to Violations Policy, Incentive Response Grid, and Violation Response Grid have been drafted, but not yet implemented. Staff shared mixed buy-in for these tools.
- **Use of sanctions.** Violations and flash incarcerations are used frequently. There does not appear to be any significant racial/ethnic disparities in the use of these sanctions. Clients and partners have varied perceptions about the degree to which sanctions are used appropriately by the Department.

### Programs and Services

- **Services.** A range of programs and resources are available to address probation clients' criminogenic and stabilization needs, with a number of services co-located in the Day Reporting Center (DRC). High needs, limited services, and financial barriers create challenges in fully supporting clients with housing, mental health, and substance use needs.
- **Program data.** While the Department has invested in evaluations to understand the effectiveness of programs, data on referrals, participation, and dosage outside of the DRC is limited.



## Recommendations

### Organizational Culture and Communication

- 1.1 Through a collaborative process, review implementation of the 2018-2020 Strategic Plan and refine key focus areas for the Department.** Engaging staff at all levels of the Department to review achievements, identify barriers and facilitators, and define new and existing priorities develop a new three-year strategic plan would provide a venue for collaboration and support organizational cohesion.
- 1.2 Expand mechanisms to recognize staff and celebrate successes.** This can include staff awards, acknowledgment of staff achievements in personal email communication from leadership, and unit and department meetings as appropriate.
- 1.3 Strengthen internal communication, particularly between management and line staff.** The Department should expand mechanisms for line staff to provide feedback to management, including ways to provide more private feedback.

### Responsibilities

- 2.1 Support staff in understanding how to navigate their role.** Operating as both a helper and an enforcer of court orders can place staff in situations that appear contradictory. However, there are elements that make a helper an effective agent of change (e.g., caring) and elements that make an enforcer an effective agent of change (e.g., clear communicator). Staff policies, training, and Departmental communication should reinforce that these roles are complementary and how behavior change is integral to public safety.
- 2.2 Collect data to identify how staff spend their time and use these data to revise Department expectations, policies, and practices.** Comparing the ideal use of time to the actual use of time should inform changes to Departmental policies and practices, including contact standards. Department expectations for officers should be feasible and aligned with the Department's mission. As expectations, policies, and practices around staff responsibilities are revised, the Department should explore strategies for line staff to allocate more time to ongoing client engagement and develop more structured schedules.

### Client Engagement

- 3.1 Develop peer-led learning opportunities to support buy-in and use of motivational interviewing and other EBPs.** Peer-led learning opportunities can help support buy-in for and comfort using EBPs through peer coaching, peer mentorship, and/or the establishment of communities of practice.
- 3.2 Review implementation of the 2018 EPICS Assessment recommendations.** The EPICS workgroups should discuss which strategies resulted in greater buy-in and use of EPICS and which strategies require continued attention and investment, with the goal of making EPICS a daily practice for almost all client contacts.
- 3.3 Strengthen training to better support how officers work with clients and the use of EBPs.** Provide periodic booster trainings for risk/needs assessments, case planning and motivational interviewing; review training data to ensure trainings outlined in the annual training plan are offered and attended; and implement strategies to reduce the training burden on staff while still promoting the uptake of new skills.
- 3.4 Standardize and expand mechanisms for clients to communicate with their supervising probation officer to increase accessibility and create consistency.** To support clients' communication with their probation officers, develop policies requiring probation officers to communicate virtually and/or adopt tools such as to support communication via text (e.g., Uptrust, OffenderLink).
- 3.5 As the Probation Department strengthens its case planning process, ensure there is a mechanism to assess case plan quality and completeness.** In particular, these assessments should ensure that case plans include goals that are aligned with clients' needs and are updated regularly.



Behavior Response

- 4.1 Refine and release the behavior response grid and policy, which should include both incentives and sanctions.** Consider expanding the use of verbal and written reprimands to respond to all low-level behaviors, regardless of risk level; ensuring that the behaviors and responses classified as “high” in the violation response grid are appropriately categorized; clearly distinguishing accountability responses from behavior change responses; and establish mechanisms to ensure that flash incarcerations are only used for cases that pose a significant and real threat to public safety.
- 4.2 Support implementation of the behavior response policy through training, bidirectional communication, and data.** The Department should train officers on the behavior response policies and develop tools to support their use; provide opportunities for officers to share feedback on behavior response policies and be open to revisions, based on this feedback; communicate to clients the incentives and sanctions they may receive while on probation supervision and the behaviors that will warrant these responses; and develop data collection strategies to measure fidelity to these policies and identify any disparities in their use.

Programs and Services

- 5.1 Reduce barriers and expand services to meet client needs.** Based on the identified service gaps and barriers, the Department and the County should work toward increasing availability of permanent housing, behavior health services, and peer-based services; decreasing financial and geographic barriers to access; reducing racial/ethnic disparities in service participation, and incentivizing program completion.
- 5.2 Expand opportunities for coordination between community-based service providers and probation officers.** Consider regularly convening (e.g., through monthly virtual meetings) community-based providers and probation staff to share program updates, discuss client engagement, and troubleshoot logistical challenges. Consider designating a probation staff member as a community services liaison officer, to oversee communication and coordination with all community-based organizations and providers.
- 5.3 Increase awareness of available programs and services.** Develop an updated list of all community-based services that includes program descriptions, eligibility criteria, and primary contact information.
- 5.4 Establish a system to record and monitor client service referrals and receipt.** Explore systems to support consistent, accurate recording of program referrals, participation, and dosage for all probation clients.

Data

- 6.1 Identify Departmental goals and associated performance measures, collect data to measure progress toward these goals, and share results across the Department.** As part of the strategic planning process, the Department should identify its short-term and long-term goals and objectives and establish associated performance measures.
- 6.2 Track successful, unsuccessful, and neutral probation supervision exits.** Measure and track the degree to which probation clients are successful while under probation supervision—and variations in success rates across risk levels, demographics, and caseload type.
- 6.3 Develop mechanisms to receive client feedback.** Consider ways to encourage client survey from clients with diverse backgrounds and experiences and develop approaches (such as anonymity) to ensure the information provided is an honest reflection of clients’ experiences
- 6.4 Conduct validation of the Probation Department adult risk and needs assessment tool locally.** Through the validation, assess for potential racial/ethnic and gender disparities.
- 6.5 Address limitations in data collection on race/ethnicity and gender identity in order to effectively carry out analyses that examine bias and inequity in the system.** Justice partners have an opportunity to modify IJS to enable individuals to self-report their race/ethnicity and gender identity, while still maintaining alignment of the Integrated Justice System with federal reporting requirements.



# Introduction

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## Background

California Assembly Bill 109 (AB 109) is the cornerstone of the state's legislative efforts to reduce the prison population and close the revolving door of justice system involvement for individuals convicted of non-violent, non-serious, and non-sexual offenses. In 2016, the Sonoma County Community Corrections Partnership (CCP) contracted Resource Development Associates (RDA) to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation, effectiveness, and costs associated with AB 109 realignment. Beginning in 2016, RDA worked with Sonoma County to identify the key priorities and areas of interest pertaining to the County's AB 109 system, examine the availability and quality of quantitative data sources, and develop a plan for comprehensive evaluation. RDA and the County are employing a developmental approach to evaluation, in which annual evaluation plans are designed to build on the learnings from the previous year. Over the first three years of the evaluation, RDA completed the following activities:

- **System-Level Process Evaluation** of the overall implementation of the county's AB 109 system and associated programs and services (2018).
- **Recidivism Outcomes Analyses** of the Post Release Community Supervision (PRCS), Mandatory Supervision (MS), Formal Probation, and 1170(h) Jail Only population (2018).
- **Needs and Cost Analysis** of MS and PRCS individuals' assessed needs and the county's spending on associated programs and services (2018).
- **Day Reporting Center (DRC) Process Evaluation and Outcome Evaluation** to examine implementation of the DRC and its impact on participant outcomes (2019).
- **Program-Level Evaluation Planning** to support AB 109 service providers to develop data and evaluation capacity (2019).
- **Program-Level Process and Outcome Evaluation** of California Human Development's outpatient substance use disorder program at the DRC (2019).
- **Program-Level Evaluations** of three AB 109-funded programs, including a transitional housing, residential substance use treatment, and employment program (2020).
- **Reentry Best Practice Review** of literature on best practices in reentry that identified key areas and activities to support successful reentry (2020).

The fourth year of the evaluation includes a **Reentry Assessment**, a **Probation Process Evaluation**, and **Research and Planning to Address Program Barriers**.



## Current Report

This evaluation focuses on the alignment of the Sonoma County Probation Department (Department) with best and evidence-based practices for adult community supervision. Through evaluation planning and qualitative and quantitative data collection, RDA identified the following five areas as most salient to the Department:

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For each area, this report describes best and evidence-based practices, assesses the Department's alignment with these practices, and provide recommendations to strengthen alignment.

## Overview and Methodology

This evaluation was guided by the following evaluation questions:

### Evaluation Questions

1. To what extent has the Probation Department adopted promising and evidence-based practices in adult community supervision in its policies and procedures?
2. To what extent has the Probation Department implemented promising and evidence-based practices in adult community supervision?
3. To what extent does the Probation Department environment support the use of promising and evidence-based practices in adult community supervision?

As reflected in the evaluation questions, this report not only explores the extent to which the Department has adopted and implemented promising and evidence-based practices, but also the extent to which more environmental factors (e.g., organizational culture, internal communication, staff morale) support their use. As detailed in the section on *Organizational Culture and Communication*, EBP implementation is supported by a strong organizational culture, including an engaged staff and a clear mission and vision.

## Probation Advisory Team

An Advisory Team made up of probation line staff, supervisors, and management met four times over the course of this evaluation to provide oversight, support, and guidance to data collection activities and findings. Feedback and insight from the Advisory Team was used to inform the evaluation plan, vet and provide nuance to the evaluation findings, and develop recommendations.





## Data Sources

To answer the above evaluation questions, RDA developed a mixed methods assessment that incorporates quantitative and qualitative data sources. The time period for most quantitative data was calendar years 2018 through 2020.<sup>1</sup> Quantitative data sources include datasets provided by the Probation Department and an online client survey. The client survey was adapted from the Department’s youth survey and included questions to capture feedback about clients’ experiences across case plan involvement, EPICS, probation office and officer satisfaction, program participation and satisfaction, and procedural justice. Clients who completed the survey were provided a \$20 gift card incentive. Tables 1 and 2, below, provide a complete list of the quantitative and qualitative data sources and the associated data elements collected from each source.

**Table 1. Quantitative Data Sources and Elements**

Data Source	Data Elements
<b>Probation Department</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Client demographics, including gender, age, race/ethnicity, place of residence</li><li>• Client caseloads</li><li>• Risk and needs assessment results</li><li>• Contacts between clients and probation officers</li><li>• Case plan timelines, identified needs, and associated goals</li><li>• Probation violations and flash incarcerations</li><li>• DRC participation</li><li>• Grant status (e.g., inactive, terminated, active)</li><li>• Probation staff training attendance</li></ul>
<b>Client Survey (completed by 32 individuals)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Case planning</li><li>• Service referrals and participation</li><li>• Experiences and satisfaction with Supervising Probation Officer, including questions related to procedural justice</li></ul>

Qualitative data was gathered through focus groups and key informant interviews with justice partners and community-based organizations. Since data collection for this evaluation and RDA’s *Reentry Assessment* took place at the same time, interviews and focus groups were used to gather information for both reports. Table 2, below, provides a list of all qualitative data sources, the data collection method, and the number of individuals engaged.

<sup>1</sup> Note, most data sources provide data through mid-December 2020.



Table 2. Qualitative Data Sources and Elements

Data Source	Method	# of Participants
Probation Management	Interviews	5
Probation Supervisors	Focus Groups	11
Probation Line Staff	Focus Groups	18
Probation Non-Sworn Staff <sup>2</sup>	Interviews	5
Probation Clients <sup>3</sup>	Focus Groups	12
Sheriff's Office Staff	Interviews	2
Behavioral Health Staff	Interviews	4
Human Services Staff	Interview	3
Public Defender's Office	Interview	2
District Attorney's Office	Interview	1
Superior Court	Interview	1
Community-Based Organizations	Focus Groups	6
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>70</b>

## Analytic Methods

**Thematic analysis.** RDA employed thematic analysis to examine stakeholder transcripts and other qualitative sources (e.g., policies and procedures) to identify trends in perspectives across stakeholders.

**Statistical analysis.** RDA calculated descriptive statistics (e.g., means, frequencies, percentages) to examine the demographics, risks, and needs of the adult probation population; caseload sizes; the degree to which officers met contact standards and other Departmental policies guiding the frequency of risk and needs assessments and case planning; DRC participation; and probation violations and flash incarcerations.

## Considerations and Limitations

As with any real-world evaluation, there are limitations to this assessment that are important to consider.

**Impacts of COVID-19.** This assessment began in fall 2020 in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collection activities, including interviews and focus groups, that were planned to be in-person shifted to virtual settings. Virtual meetings mitigated some travel and scheduling barriers, but the pandemic also created personal challenges for some individuals that may have impacted their availability to engage in data collection activities and resulted in fewer clients participating in focus groups and client surveys. Although quantitative data for this evaluation was available through December 2020, RDA limited some analyses to prior to March 2020 due to significant changes as a result of the pandemic.

**Selection bias.** Probation officers invited current clients to participate in a focus group and online survey. A total of 12 individuals participated in focus groups and 32 individuals completed the client survey. While they represented a variety of caseload types and socio-demographic characteristics, the individuals

<sup>2</sup> Probation non-sworn staff includes clerical and training staff.

<sup>3</sup> To incentivize participation, clients who participated in focus groups received a \$40 gift card.



## Sonoma County Probation

### *Adult Community Supervision Process Evaluation*

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interested and able to participate in focus groups and the survey represent a small fraction of total probation clients. It is possible that those who participated in data collection have different characteristics (e.g., more communicative or actively engaged with their probation officer, hold more positive impressions of the department and staff) than those who did not participate. Similarly, RDA worked with the Probation Department to schedule interviews and focus groups with probation staff spanning management, supervisors, line staff, and non-sworn staff. While we spoke with a wide variety of staff, it is possible those who attended do not represent the department's total range of experiences or perspectives.

**Quantitative data.** RDA was unable to calculate certain descriptive statistics due to limitations in the data we were able to access for this evaluation. In particular, data on probation violations was incomplete and not available for the PRCS population. Additionally, there are limitations in how justice partners document demographic data in the County's Integrated Justice System (IJS). Specifically, race and ethnicity are combined in one field in the department's data system; race/ethnicity is not necessarily self-reported and thus may not be consistent with how the individual self-identifies; and gender options only include male or female.



# Population Overview

RDA received quantitative data for 5,913 unique adults active on community supervision at any time between January 1, 2018 and December 14, 2020. Some probation clients had more than one supervision period, therefore these 5,913 individuals had 6,304 uninterrupted periods of probation over this time.

## Probation Population Demographics

As shown in Table 3, the majority of probation clients were White and male, with a sizeable minority of Hispanic individuals. Approximately half (53%) of clients were under the age of 34. The most common places of residence at the start of supervision were Santa Rosa (43% of clients) and Petaluma (8% of clients).

The number of individuals starting a new supervision period decreased considerably from 2019 (n=1,233) to 2020 (n=860). In 2020, a smaller proportion of women started supervision than in 2018 or 2019 (15% in 2020, compared to 20% in 2019 and 21% in 2018). The race/ethnicity of probation clients starting new supervision periods has remained generally consistent from 2018 through 2020.

Compared to the broader Sonoma County adult population, Black and Hispanic individuals are overrepresented in the probation population. As shown in Tables 3 and 4, Hispanic individuals comprise 32% of the probation population, but only 23% of the Sonoma County adult population. Though only 2% of Sonoma County's adult population is Black, 7% of probation clients are Black.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 3. 2018-2020 Adult Probation Population Demographics (N=5,913)**

Demographic	%
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	20%
Male	80%
<b>Race</b>	
American Indian	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2%
Black	7%
Hispanic	32%
White	56%
<b>Age</b>	
18-24	17%
25-34	36%
35-44	25%
45-54	14%
55+	8%

**Table 4. Sonoma County Adult Population Race/Ethnicity (N=400,582)**

Race/Ethnicity	%
Non-Hispanic American Indian	1%
Non-Hispanic Asian	5%
Non-Hispanic Black	2%
Hispanic	23%
Non-Hispanic White	68%
Non-Hispanic Other/Multiracial	2%

<sup>4</sup> Community Survey 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables. The race/ethnicity of the probation population may not be exactly comparable to ACS estimates due to differences in how race is categorized in each data source.



## Probation Type and Risk Level

As shown in Table 5, the majority (81%) of supervision periods between 2018-2020 were for Formal Probation, with 20% sentenced under AB 109 on either PRCS (12%) or Mandatory Supervision (8%). In 2020, a slightly smaller proportion of new supervision periods were for Formal Probation, compared to previous years.

Risk levels were fairly evenly distributed across the population, with 36% high risk, 29% moderate risk, and 36% low risk, based on clients' first Static Risk Assessment score for each supervision period (see Table 6). Female clients were more commonly assessed as low risk (56%); while American Indian and Black clients were more commonly assessed as high risk (54% and 56%, respectively). The majority of MS and PRCS clients were assessed as high risk (72% and 77%, respectively). As shown in Table 7, new clients appeared to be slightly decreasing in assessed risk level.

**Table 5. Probation Type and Severity (N=6,304)**

Probation Type & Severity	#	%
<b>Probation Type</b>		
Formal Probation	5,079	81%
Mandatory Supervision	492	8%
Post-Release Community Supervision	733	12%
<b>Severity</b>		
Felony	4,835	76%
Misdemeanor	1,469	23%

**Table 6. Probation Population Risk Scores (2018-2020)**

Risk Score	#	%
High Drug	255	4%
High Property	874	15%
High Violent	949	16%
Moderate	1,732	29%
Low	2,177	36%

**Table 7. Risk Levels of New Probation Clients (2018-2020)**

Risk Level	2018 (n=1,214)		2019 (n=1,007)		2020 (n=566)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
High	448	37%	321	32%	177	31%
Moderate	333	27%	284	28%	168	30%
Low	433	36%	402	40%	221	39%

## Supervision Length and Exit

The average supervision period for clients who exited probation supervision between 2018-2020 was approximately 1.8 years for formal probation, 11 months for Mandatory Supervision, and 14 months for PRCS. These clients may have exited probation for any reason.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Grant status data is available to identify whether an individual's supervision grant was expired, revoked, terminated, or transferred. However, these statuses do not indicate whether an individual's exit from supervision was successful, unsuccessful, or neutral (e.g., transferred out of the county).



# Findings

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## Organizational Culture and Communication

### Background and Best Practices

Organizational culture is a system of shared values, beliefs, and practices that inform the actions of individuals within an organization. Research indicates that a positive organizational culture is characterized by staff who are engaged in their work, and that an engaged staff understand expectations, believe in the value of their work, have the necessary resources to complete their responsibilities, and trust that their supervisors have their best interests in mind.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, a positive organizational culture includes a compelling mission and vision for the organization, and specific values that are regularly articulated and reinforced by staff across the agency.

Another important aspect of organizational culture is an agency's climate, which reflects staff's experiences in the work environment. Studies show that a performance-driven organizational climate that emphasizes knowledge and skill development facilitates the adoption of evidence-based and effective practices.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, EBP implementation is more likely to be successful if it is introduced into a supportive organizational culture, particularly one which includes staff cohesion and autonomy, a clear mission and goals, and open communication.<sup>8</sup> Research also indicates that it is common for staff to discontinue the use of new skills and knowledge over time,<sup>9</sup> therefore it is important for organizations to emphasize continuous learning opportunities (e.g. training, coaching, feedback) and to offer support and resources.<sup>10,11</sup> Additionally, data systems that produce reliable, accessible, and actionable data—and leadership who make decisions based on that data—support EBP implementation by allowing agencies to assess their progress.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, a strong organizational climate in which staff are engaged and have opportunities to build and refresh their knowledge, and in which there is a positive, data-driven organizational culture, will facilitate effective EBP implementation and other organizational change efforts.

Communication is also a key component of organizational culture and EBP implementation. Effective internal communication contributes to organizational success by building employee morale, satisfaction

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<sup>6</sup> Gallup. (2017). State of the American Workplace.

<sup>7</sup> Friedmann, P. D., Taxman, F. S., & Henderson, C. E. (2007). Evidence-Based Treatment Practices for Drug-Involved Adults in the Criminal Justice System. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 32, 267–277.

<sup>8</sup> Barwick, M.A., Blydell, K. M., Stasiulis, E., Ferguson, H. B., Blase, K., & Fixsen, D. (2005). Knowledge Transfer and Evidence-Based Practice in Children's Mental Health. Toronto, Ontario: Children's Mental Health Ontario.

<sup>9</sup> Miller, J., & Maloney, C. (2013). Practitioner Compliance with Risk/Needs Assessment Tools: A Theoretical and Empirical Assessment. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 40(7), 716-736.

<sup>10</sup> Taxman, F. S., Maass, S. A., & Toronjo, H. L. (2013). *SOARING 2: Skills for Offender Assessment and Responsivity in New Goals*. Fairfax, VA: Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence.

<sup>11</sup> Miller, W.R., Yahne, C.E., Moyers, T.B., Martinez, J., Pirritano, M. (2004). A Randomized Trial of Methods to Help Clinicians Learn Motivational Interviewing. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 72(6),1050-62.

<sup>12</sup> Metz, A., & Bartley, L. (2012). Active Implementation Frameworks for Program Success: How to Use Implementation Science to Improve Outcomes for Children. *Zero to Three*, 32(4), 11-18.



and engagement; giving staff a voice; reducing opportunities for misunderstanding; improving policies and procedures; and increasing efficiencies.<sup>13</sup> Communication is most effective when individuals work together, within and across teams, to determine who should share information, the cadence (e.g., daily, weekly), and the medium (e.g., face-to-face, email).<sup>14</sup> Communication during organizational transitions (e.g., systems changes) is also an important tool for managing staff sentiments and resistance to change. Organizational change management research suggests leadership should acknowledge feelings of loss with sympathy; provide direct and frequent communication to all levels of the organization about the logistics of the transition and the associated expectations of staff; refrain from relying on “trickle-down” communication through supervisors, who are also experiencing change; position the past as a positive legacy that paved the way for new practices; and celebrate successes associated with the change.<sup>15</sup>

Two-way communication, which provides structured, consistent opportunities for line staff to share ideas and feedback with management, is also essential. Listening to staff builds trust and helps address emerging challenges before they become more formal issues.<sup>16</sup> In addition to soliciting staff input, effective organizational communication also includes a transparent feedback loop in which leadership has a clear process for reporting back to staff on what was done with their input, including when the outcome might not be in line with what staff requested.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, external communication, including beliefs and practices that dictate how the agency engages with partners and stakeholders, is another integral aspect of organizational culture. For probation departments, these relationships can support positive outcomes for individuals under supervision and the department itself. Probation departments should foster structured relationships with public agencies, community-based organizations, community members, and other informal community supports.<sup>18</sup> These partnerships should be systematic and facilitate formalized processes to address clients’ needs through evidence-based and culturally appropriate practices.

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<sup>13</sup> Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). (2021). *Managing Organizational Communication*. Retrieved from <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/managingorganizationalcommunication.aspx>

<sup>14</sup> Maxfield, B. (2021). *5 Ways to Improve Team Communication*. Vital Smarts. <https://www.vital-smarts.com/crucialskills/2021/04/5-ways-to-improve-team-communication/>

<sup>15</sup> Resource Development Associates. (2017). *LA Probation Governance Study: Review of Best Practices in Probation*.

<sup>16</sup> Atkins, A. (2020). *A Modern Leader’s Guide to Organizational Transparency*. Slack. <https://slack.com/intl/pt-br/blog/transformation/a-modern-leaders-guide-to-organizational-transparency>

<sup>17</sup> Society for Human Resources Management (2021). *Managing Organizational Communication*. Retrieved from <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/managingorganizationalcommunication.aspx>

<sup>18</sup> Schiraldi, V., Western, B., & Bradner, K. (2015). Community-Based Responses to Justice-Involved Young Adults. *New Thinking in Community Corrections Bulletin*.



## Findings

**The Probation Department’s 2018-2020 Strategic Plan emphasized the Department’s commitment to evidence-based practices (EBPs) and identified goals and strategies related to EPBs, internal capacity and effectiveness, and collaboration with partners and community. The Department has made some progress achieving these goals, but many areas still require focused attention.**

In 2017, the Sonoma County Probation Department undertook a comprehensive process to develop its 2018-2020 Strategic Plan, including an online survey, staff focus groups, outside stakeholder interviews, and a staff work session. Through this process, the Department developed the following mission, vision, and core values:

- Mission: Sonoma County Probation is committed to reducing recidivism, fostering accountability, promoting positive behavior change, and safeguarding the community.
- Vision: Achieving justice and enhancing public safety in the community by making a positive difference in the lives of victims, delinquent youth, adult offenders, and their families.
- Core Values: Public safety, equity and justice, assisting victims, integrity, learning community, staff excellence, collaboration, family, and community.

The Department identified four focus areas for the Strategic Plan: (1) evidence-based practices and data-based decision making, (2) internal capacity and effectiveness, (3) Sonoma County Strategic Priority: Safety Net, and (4) collaboration with partners and community. EBPs are highlighted as a priority for the Department, but—as noted in the plan—increased communication efforts are needed to increase staff understanding, buy-in, and use of EBPs and strengthen the Department’s internal capacity and effectiveness.

As discussed throughout this report, the 2018-2020 Strategic Plan identifies many of the core issues that continue to impede successful implementation of EBPs. While some strategies identified in the Strategic Plan have been implemented and led to improvements, other areas require additional efforts. These are discussed in more detail within this section and throughout this report.

**Communication challenges contribute to low morale and a sentiment from line staff that their experiences and feedback are not valued or prioritized.**

As part of the development of the 2018-2020 Strategic Plan, the Department administered an organizational climate and productivity survey to staff. This survey identified that staff’s involvement in Departmental decisions related to their work and the perceived levels at which decisions are made are key challenges to the department’s productivity. To address these concerns, the 2018-2020 Strategic Plan included strategies to hold some staff meetings outside the work environment, convene unit meetings, involve staff in workload discussions, and have staff attend management meetings on a rotating basis.

Since the development of the 2018-2020 Strategic Plan, which identified internal capacity and effectiveness as an area of focus, the frequency of unit meetings has increased and are used to communicate





Department policy, share key research findings, and discuss emerging issues. However, while lateral communication among line staff is strong, communication between management and line staff remains an issue. Line staff do not feel as though they have meaningful opportunities to provide input and use their on-the-ground experience to shape departmental policies and practices. When line staff feedback has been solicited, they do not see how that information is used to inform decision-making. A general sentiment across line staff is that management does not value their feedback and experience, leading to low morale and larger concerns across line staff that management does not understand the day-to-day experiences and challenges they face.

*“It often seems as if line staff express their ideas and the Department goes another direction. While this is to be expected, as line staff do not have the whole picture, it can feel frustrating, when time and time again, input is given and ignored. Acknowledging the input and maybe an explanation of why controversial decisions are made could go a long way in people feeling that their say is valid and valued.” – Probation Staff*

*“We have an incredibly difficult job, balancing many tasks and expectations, and we risk our lives to protect the community and victims. Morale is very poor.... And it feels to us that management fails to recognize the obstacles we face every day and the great work we do on a daily basis.” – Probation Staff*

**Variations in how information is disseminated from management to line staff can lead to confusion in top-down communication.**

Staff also shared concerns about the way that organizational updates are communicated to staff. Information is frequently relayed from management to line staff through supervisors, who then have discretion over when and how to share information. Supervisors shared concerns that inconsistent and untimely dissemination of information from management to supervisors can lead to lack of clarity. Without consistency, information can get lost and lead to confusion and mixed messages among line staff.

*“The approach of the information provided by management is inconsistent. When procedures change or a decision is made with very specific directions or a very specific process, it seems information straight from management is more appropriate and should be provided quickly.” – Probation Staff*

*“One unit gets information one way and another gets it another way. ...by the time it gets to line staff it’s all messed up...There needs to be a clear channel.”  
— Probation Staff*

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted internal communication in various ways. For some units, meeting frequency increased as both a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2018-2020 Strategic Plan. However, staff noted that there have been less frequent division meetings that provided an opportunity for staff and management to meet together.



**While justice agencies report strong, effective collaboration with Probation, there are opportunities for more structured interdepartmental coordination across the County.**

Interagency collaboration is an important feature of probation, as individuals under probation supervision often engage with multiple Sonoma County departments. Staff across justice agencies appreciate the open, collaborative relationships they have with probation management and staff. Leadership from justice agencies also noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in increased communication among department leadership, as agencies had to quickly pivot, adapt, and learn from new policies and procedures.

The issue of interdepartmental communication was emphasized in the Department's 2018-2020 Strategic Plan, which identified improved communication with other county departments as a goal. The plan noted that external stakeholders requested increased information sharing about mutual clients and about the Probation Department's structure, staff, and procedures.

While communication between some justice stakeholders has increased, opportunities for structured collaboration across justice, behavioral health, and human service partners are limited. Probation line staff described that in some cases, not receiving timely information about the status of individuals on their caseload can have negative impacts for clients. In one example, line staff shared that Behavioral Health might know an individual is on an involuntary psychiatric hold but be unable to disclose their status to the supervising probation officer. Their probation officer might then file a warrant for failing to report.

The county has made some progress supporting interagency collaboration. Since the development of the Strategic Plan, the Department launched an engagement team, which has updated Probation's website and developed informational materials for clients, partners, and the public about Probation's role in the community. Staff also lead and participate in interagency activities, including community events, such as Coffee with a Cop, and formal initiatives, such as the Sonoma Stepping Up Workgroup, which oversees the design and implementation of the Mental Health Diversion Program and oversees three federal grant programs that serve individuals who have mental illness and are justice-involved. Additionally, the Interdepartmental Multidisciplinary Team (IMDT) model, discussed in more detail in the *Program and Services* section of this report, has provided an effective model for coordinated case management across County departments.



## Navigating the Dual Roles and Responsibilities

### Background and Best Practices

Striking an appropriate balance between a “law enforcement” and “social worker” roles and functions is a common challenge among probation officers. Research on probation officer roles increasingly indicates that community supervision programs are more effective when officers exhibit a balanced orientation between these functions.<sup>19</sup> In particular, staff who oversee involuntary clients—as is the case with probation officers—are uniquely tasked with both caring for individuals and maintaining control through a “firm, fair, and caring” relationship that promotes more positive client outcomes.<sup>20</sup> Although research suggests a more balanced orientation is most effective, the legally prescribed roles of probation officers generally have a stronger emphasis on law enforcement functions, rather than rehabilitative tasks, which may make it challenging to achieve an equilibrium.<sup>21</sup>

While individual and departmental beliefs about probation officers’ role may appear static, research suggests that probation officer philosophies are the result of both personal and organizational factors, and officer attitudes can be changed.<sup>22</sup> One body of research suggests reframing the role of probation officers from “referee” to “coach.”<sup>23</sup> Rather than operating from an authoritarian, impersonal position, this shift encourages officers to individually assess clients’ risk and protective factors, assist them in developing prosocial skills, apply rules fairly in ways that encourage and support clients, and learn best practices and focus on behavior change.

In addition, probation officers juggle many responsibilities. Officers are responsible for administrative and organizational tasks, as well as client management. They can be exposed to psychologically traumatic events and secondary trauma, both of which can result in a variety of stressors.<sup>24,25</sup> Stressors can be mitigated by reducing probation officers’ administrative workload, enacting clear policies to streamline administrative tasks and use technology efficiently, having clear organizational health and safety policies that management is trained to enact, and providing access to mental health resources.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Pappozzi, M., & Gendreau, P. (2005). An Intensive Supervision Program that Worked: Service Delivery, Professional Orientation, and Organizational Supportiveness. *The Prison Journal*, 85, 445–66

<sup>20</sup> Skeem, J. L., & Manchak, S. (2008). Back to the Future: From Klockars’ Model of Effective Supervision to Evidence-Based Practice in Probation. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 47(3), 220–247.

<sup>21</sup> Hsieh, M., Hafoka, M., Woo, Y., van Wormer, J., Stohr, M.K., & Hemmens, C. (2015). Probation Officer Roles: A Statutory Analysis. *Federal Probation*, 79(3), 20-37.

<sup>22</sup> Clear, T.R., & Latessa, E.J. (1993). Probation Officer Roles in Intensive Supervision: Surveillance versus Treatment. *Justice Quarterly*, 10, 441–462.

<sup>23</sup> Lovins, Brian & Cullen, F.T. & Latessa, Edward & Jonson, Cheryl. (2018). Probation Officer as a Coach: Building a New Professional Identity. *Federal Probation*. 82. 13-19.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis, K.T., Lewis, L.S., & Garby, T.M. (2012). Surviving the Trenches: The Personal Impact of the Job on Probation Officers. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 38, 67-84

<sup>25</sup> White, W., Gasperin, D., Nystrom, J., Ambrose, T., & Esarey, C. (2005). The Other Side of Burnout: Exemplary Performance and Health among Probation Officers. *Perspectives: The Journal of the American Probation and Parole Association*, 29(2), 26–31.

<sup>26</sup> Norman, M., & Ricciardelli, R. (2021). Operational and Organisational Stressors in Community Correctional Work: Insights from Probation and Parole Officers in Ontario, Canada. *Probation Journal*.



## Findings

**As probation officers' roles and responsibilities have expanded over time, staff find it challenging to fulfill their many duties.**

Staff from the Probation Department and other county agencies appreciate supervisors' and line staffs' strong work ethic and commitment to their jobs. Over the last ten years, the Probation Department began supervising a higher proportion of high-risk individuals (due to AB 109); assumed operation of the Day Reporting Center; implemented a pretrial services program; and adopted Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS)<sup>27</sup> and other evidence-based practices. In addition to the additional responsibilities, probation staff have supported disaster response during the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters including wildfires and floods. Probation management emphasized supervisors' and line staff's flexibility to take on new roles and resiliency, particularly during disasters.

*"All disasters have exhibited incredible flexibility of our staff. They do activities that aren't necessarily in their job description. ...they stepped up and asked when and where they were needed. Our population is resilient and committed to public service. Watching staff serve during disasters was impressive, it showed they can take on complex processes quickly and deliver." – Probation Management*

While probation staff are invested in their roles, justice partners shared concerns that officers do not have enough time to do all that is required of them. Probation staff noted that new priorities get added but few are removed, and that there is not a shared understanding of how to prioritize these responsibilities. A 2018 assessment on the use of EPICS found that the Department's approach to supervision is progressive and innovative, but that a risk of "pushing the envelope" is overextension.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the Department's 2018-2020 Strategic Plan noted that staff responsibilities expanded in recent years and that stronger communication between staff and management about how to manage and prioritize changing workloads could improve morale and effectiveness.

*"My perception is that Probation does too much. Not because they're doing a bad job, but laws are changing so much that more and more is dumped on Probation. So they have too much to do." – Justice Partner*

This perception of overextension was reiterated by Probation line staff, who shared that they believe departmental expectations about client contacts and EPICS sessions are unrealistic, given all of their responsibilities. The Department's Case Management Policy requires the following contacts:<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> EPICS is a research-based model for structuring supervision interactions.

<sup>28</sup> Schreiner, P. (2018). Assessment on EPICS Implementation for Sonoma County: Preliminary Assessment on Adult Supervision.

<sup>29</sup> Clients participating in the Day Reporting Center (DRC) have modified contact standards and specialized caseloads may also have differing contact standards.



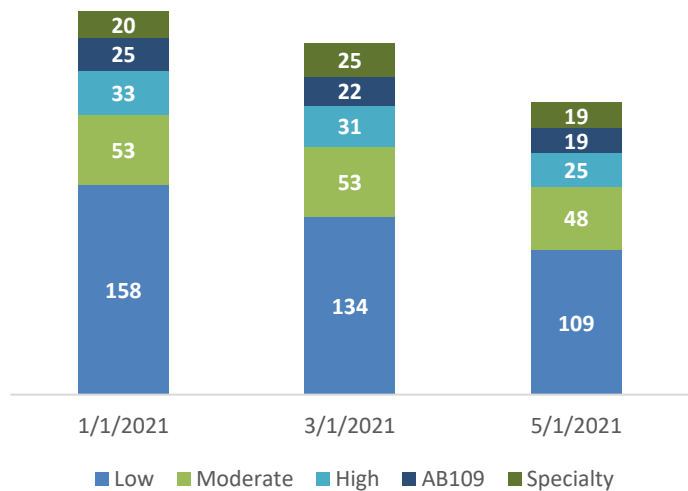
**Sonoma County Probation**  
*Adult Community Supervision Process Evaluation*

- **MS and PRCS during the first 90 days following release from prison or jail:** Three contacts per month; including at least one face-to-face contact and one home/community contact.
- **High risk:** Three face-to-face contacts in 90 days, one of which must be a home visit; two collateral/other contacts per month.
- **Moderate risk:** Four face-to-face contacts in 180 days, one of which must be a home visit; one collateral/other contact per month.
- **Low risk:** One face-to-face contact every 90 days; home/residence verification every 180 days.

During the ten months prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, probation officers met face-to-face contact standards 78% of the time and home visit standards 64% of the time. The contact standards, which were last modified in 2014, were established with the intent to modify as needed. However, the Department has not adjusted the standards, due in part to wildfires and other disasters that required the Department to assist in emergency response.

Line staff also cited high caseloads as a barrier to managing their workloads and engaging closely with individuals under their supervision. However, since the implementation of Assembly Bill (AB) 1950 on January 1, 2021 – which shortened the length of probation in most misdemeanor cases to one year and most felony cases to two years – the number of active supervision grants in Sonoma County have continued to decrease through May 2021 (see Figure 1). The Department plans to continue to monitor caseload sizes to assess compliance with recommended ratios.<sup>30</sup>

**Figure 1. Supervision Caseload Ratios by Caseload Type, Active Supervision Grants Only**



<sup>30</sup> The American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) recommends caseloads sizes of 20:1 for high-risk intensive adult supervision, 50:1 for non-intensive high- and moderate-risk adult supervision, and 200:1 for low-risk adult supervision. In addition to these recommendations, the APPA advises that caseload sizes should account for the workloads and demands of individual officers, to ensure time is used effectively and efficiently.



**While the Probation Department expects and encourages probation officers to take on responsibilities related to law enforcement and behavior change, probation officers require more guidance to navigate these roles effectively.**

As noted in the Department's policy on deputy probation officers' (DPOs') roles and responsibilities: "DPOs are expected to hold individuals accountable for their actions, enforce court orders, monitor their conduct in the community, and encourage positive behavior change." To support probation officer skills development in all of these roles, the Department provides annual training on safety-related topics (e.g., defensive tactics, CPR), behavior change- and case management-related topics (e.g., EPICS, trauma-informed care, motivational interviewing), and law updates. However, while the Departments' annual training plans reflect a balance between these roles, training records indicate that officers receive more training in safety-related topics.

Probation officers continue to experience challenges upholding law enforcement-related responsibilities while simultaneously supporting behavior change. Probation staff find it can be particularly difficult to navigate these roles when they appear to conflict with one another, such as when a clients' behavior warrants a sanction and then the officer is expected to engage in cognitive behavioral strategies, such as EPICS or motivational interviewing. Officers who identify more strongly with law enforcement role also do not feel that the Department sufficiently supports that identity.

*"For [Probation clients], they don't know what side [of us] they're going to get.... It's hard for people to understand what to expect, how to relate to us, and to trust us. It sets us up for failure because... we're a jack of all trades, but master of none." –Probation Staff*

*"Public safety and behavior change continue to be presented as two separate items, as opposed to making the connection of how one affects the other. By separating these out, those who don't want to do behavior change will not make time for it, and vice versa." –Probation Staff*



## Client Engagement

### Background and Best Practices

As probation departments shift away from compliance- and surveillance-based approaches to focus on rehabilitation and recidivism reduction, researchers and practitioners have developed a number of strategies and tools to guide how probation officers should work with the individuals they supervise. Central to these approaches is the risk-need-responsivity (RNR) model, which advances several key practices, including systematically assessing for risk and allocating resources and interventions toward high-risk clients, while minimizing interventions and contact with low-risk clients.<sup>31,32,33</sup>

To adopt the RNR model, probation officers should utilize validated risk and needs assessment tools that identify static and dynamic risk factors in order to determine supervision intensity, develop case plans and goals in consultation with clients, and make necessary referrals to county and community-based services.<sup>34</sup> In the past, dynamic risk factors—also known as criminogenic needs—have been divided into primary and secondary factors. Primary factors, which were considered most predictive of criminal behavior, included criminal thinking, peers, and personality characteristics; with secondary characteristics including substance use, family, education/employment, and leisure/recreation.<sup>35</sup> More recent research indicates that all criminogenic needs are important and does not categorize them into tiers.<sup>36</sup>

During the assessment phase, probation officers should identify their clients' strengths in order to help build rapport and promote prosocial behaviors.<sup>37</sup> Probation officers should also reassess clients at established intervals (e.g., every six months) and after key life events (e.g., obtaining stable housing or full-time employment) in order to update case plans and adjust supervision intensity as appropriate.<sup>38</sup>

When working with clients, probation officers should use motivational interviewing approaches to increase probation clients' motivation to change. As noted by the National Institute of Corrections, "Staff should relate to offenders in interpersonally sensitive and constructive ways to enhance intrinsic motivation in offenders. Behavioral change is quite often an inside job; for lasting change to occur, there needs to be a level of intrinsic motivation. Motivation to change is dynamic and the probability that change may occur is

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<sup>31</sup> Bonta, J., & Andrews, D. A. (2007). Risk-need-responsivity model for offender assessment and rehabilitation. (User Report 2007–06).

<sup>32</sup> Viglione, J., & Blasko, B. L. (2018). The differential impacts of probation staff attitudes on use of evidence-based practices. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 24(4), 449.

<sup>33</sup> Lowenkamp, C. T., Latessa, E. J., & Smith, P. (2006). Does correctional program quality really matter? The impact of adhering to the principles of effective intervention. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 5(3), 575-594.

<sup>34</sup> James, N. (2015). Risk and needs assessment in the criminal justice system.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew, D.A., Bonta, J., & Wormith, J.S. (2006). The Recent Past and Near Future of Risk and/or Need Assessment. *Crime & Delinquency*, (52), 1, 7-27.

<sup>36</sup> Bonta, J., & Andrews, D. A. (2017). *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Routledge.

<sup>37</sup> Russell, C. (2010). Making the Case for an Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) Approach to Probation: From Reformation to Transformation. *Irish Probation Journal* 7, 119-132.

<sup>38</sup> Byrne, J. (2009). Maximum Impact: Targeting Supervision on Higher Risk People, Places, And Times. Pew Charitable Trusts.



strongly influenced by interpersonal interactions.” Research has found that motivational communication techniques increase engagement in treatment programs and motivation to change, as well as reduce substance use and recidivism.<sup>39</sup>

Additionally, in departments where the EPICS model is utilized to engage clients by applying the RNR framework and core correctional practices, fidelity to the model is essential for efficacy. Studies indicate a strong relationship between fidelity to the model and recidivism, notably that low fidelity is associated with null effects or an increase in recidivism.<sup>40</sup>

The following section on behavior response includes additional evidence-based practices that are integral to client engagement, including procedural justice and the use of incentives and rewards.

## Findings

**Despite organizational commitment and a concerted focus on evidence-based practice implementation, there is limited buy-in across the organization for tools that support the RNR model, including the Offender Needs Assessment, case planning, and the Effective Practices in Community Supervision model.**

The Sonoma County Probation Department has adopted a number of tools to integrate the RNR model and best practices into how probation officers engage with clients. Specifically:

- **The Adult Static Risk and Needs Assessment (SRNA)**, which measures clients’ risk to recidivate and criminogenic needs, is required to be conducted when an individual begins a probation term (to inform supervision level) and a minimum of every six months for individuals scored as high- and moderate-risk. The SRNA includes:
  - The Static Risk Assessment, which was developed and validated by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy,<sup>41</sup> but has not been validated locally in Sonoma County.<sup>42</sup>
  - The Offender Needs Assessment (ONA), which contains approximately 70 questions across areas including education, employment, housing, family/friends, substance use, mental health, attitudes/behaviors, and coping skills. The ONA provides scores regarding clients’ risk factors, protective factors, stabilization factors, and other factors for the “Central

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<sup>39</sup> Blasko, B. L., Viglione, J., Toronjo, H., & Taxman, F. S. (2019). Probation officer–probation agency fit: Understanding disparities in the use of motivational interviewing techniques. *Corrections*, 4(1), 39-57.

<sup>40</sup> University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute. (2017). Effective practices for community supervision (EPICS): The application of science to supervision practices [Conference session]. James E. Anderson Pennsylvania Conference on Juvenile Justice, Harrisburg, PA,

<sup>41</sup>Barnoski, R. P., & Drake, E. K. (2007). Washington's Offender Accountability Act: Department of Corrections' Static Risk Instrument. Washington State Institute for Public Policy.  
[http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/977/Wsipp\\_Washingtons-Offender-Accountability-Act-Department-of-Corrections-Static-Risk-Instrument\\_Full-Report-Updated-October-2008.pdf](http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/977/Wsipp_Washingtons-Offender-Accountability-Act-Department-of-Corrections-Static-Risk-Instrument_Full-Report-Updated-October-2008.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> In addition to the SRNA, the Department also uses some assessments for specialized populations, such as the Static-99R (for individuals convicted of sex offenses) and a domestic violence assessment.





Eight” criminogenic needs: antisocial behavior, antisocial personality, criminal associates, criminal thinking, employment/school, family, leisure/recreation, and substance use.<sup>43</sup>

- **Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS)** is a research-based model for structuring supervision interactions and integrating the RNR framework to improve supervision outcomes.<sup>44</sup> Through EPICS, officers are expected to build a collaborative working relationship with each client, which sets the foundation for building motivation and behavioral change. EPICS also trains staff in cost-benefit analysis, which is intended to help clients explore behaviors that they are unmotivated to change.

A number of strategies implemented by the Department support the use of these tools and evidence-based practices. Specifically, Department leadership have communicated a strong commitment to EBPs, which is clearly reflected in case management policies. Through the Department’s Program Planning, Implementation & Evaluation (PIE) team, the Department is able to report on the degree to which staff and units meet these targets.

However, barriers to implementing the ONA, case planning, and EPICS remain. Line staff perceive that EBPs are imposed without management’s full understanding of their experiences, such as their daily workload, differences between caseloads, and their other expectations/responsibilities. Many staff do not see a value to the tools and consider them to be overly prescriptive. While these tools are used, low buy-in across staff raises concerns about the degree to which staff are actually using these tools to inform how they work with the individuals they supervise. Additionally, few probation clients participate in EPICS sessions and EPICS has not been integrated as a regular practice into probation officers’ interactions with clients. More information about utilization and the specific strengths and challenges for each tool are discussed below.

### **Offender Needs Assessment (ONA)**

**Buy-in.** Many line staff and supervisors indicated that they believe ONA is not useful because they can confirm clients’ needs through conversations and do not need a formal tool to assess them. Staff shared that clients on certain caseloads (e.g., mental health, DUI, domestic violence) have specific needs that the ONA does not assess and that some of these caseloads also have their own required assessments, which can lead to conflicting results. Line staff also shared concerns about the amount of time the ONA requires, particularly since they are encouraged to redo the assessment every time a client cycles in and out of custody. Some line staff and supervisors did acknowledge that the ONA could be a useful tool if they had more time to utilize it and do case planning.

*“I do the ONA when I get to it and identify top areas, but typically I’m already addressing those. We know out the gate what we need to work on. Program referrals and things like that take precedent. Need areas are broad enough they can be addressed by services they’re already in. So the ONA is not terribly helpful.” – Probation Staff*

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<sup>43</sup> Andrew, D.A., Bonta, J., & Wormith, J.S. (2006). The Recent Past and Near Future of Risk and/or Need Assessment. *Crime & Delinquency*, (52), 1, 7-27.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, P., Schweitzer, M., Labrecque, R. M., & Latessa, E. J. (2012). Improving probation officers' supervision skills: an evaluation of the EPICS model. *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 35(2), 189-199.



*“[The ONA] doesn’t always reflect what you need in the case plan and what you need to work with [mental health clients] on.” –Probation Staff*

*“We haven’t been able to legitimately give [the ONA] the time it’s due.” – Probation Staff*

**Score Interpretation.** Scores for each criminogenic need are presented as a percent of the total, based on risk, protective, and stabilization scores. Scores are ranked sequentially for each individual, but there are no scoring guides or thresholds to indicate whether a client’s need is high, moderate, or low in each domain.

**Utilization.** Department policy states that probation officers have 60 days to complete an ONA for new cases, with reassessments completed every 180 days for clients assessed as moderate or high risk. While staff indicated low buy-in for the ONA, they do appear to be utilizing the tool. In the ten months prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, clients’ ONAs were up to date (in accordance with assessment standards) 83% of the time. These rates decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic, when clients’ ONAs were up to date 64% of the time.<sup>45</sup>

**Training.** Over the past three years, the Probation Department’s training plan indicated that all new hires should receive 14 hours of training on the SRNA and that each year, adult supervision officers should receive at least two hours for SRNA boosters. However, staff do not appear to be receiving booster trainings. The only SRNA booster training offered to staff over the 2018-2020 calendar years appears to have been provided in October 2018, which six staff attended.<sup>46</sup>

**Inter-Rater Reliability.** The Department conducted an inter-rater reliability exercise prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which they report indicated overall consistency across officers’ administration of the ONA.

### **Case Planning**

**Buy-in.** Probation staff noted that barriers to completing case plans include limited time, cumbersome case planning software, and uncertainty about the utility and effectiveness of case planning.<sup>47</sup> Similar to concerns regarding the ONA, line staff believe that case planning is not relevant for all case types, as certain caseloads (e.g., domestic violence, sex offender) have prescribed programs and practices to meet clients’ needs. Staff with larger caseloads or with clients’ who cycle in and out of custody do not feel that they have the time to engage in case planning or work with clients on goals.

*“I feel like I’m only pushing paper when it comes to case plans.” – Probation Staff*

*“We know officers don’t develop robust, goal-orientated case plans. With caseload sizes in adult [probation], it’s not possible to make a meaningful document with each client.” – Probation Staff*

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<sup>45</sup> Data before the pandemic from May 23, 2019 to March 15, 2020. Data during the pandemic is from March 16, 2020 to December 18, 2020.

<sup>46</sup> Over this time, approximately 60 probation officers worked within adult supervision.

<sup>47</sup> The Department is planning to switch to a new user interface to make the process more user-friendly and support customization.



**Utilization.** Case planning is expected to be conducted at the same frequency of ONA administration: within 60 days for new case and updated case plans every 180 days.<sup>48</sup> In the ten months prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, case plans were up to date 76% of the time. During the pandemic, case plans were up to date 59% of the time.<sup>49</sup>

**Case Plan Quality.** On average, case plans from 2017-2020 contained between two and three goals. Overall, case plans tend to include goals aligned with clients' needs and specified targeted interventions, with approximately 70% of case plans addressing clients' highest ranked criminogenic need. Case plan goals most commonly addressed substance use (25%), antisocial personality (22%), employment/school (18%), and antisocial behavior (11%). Almost all clients (99%) had one of the "big four" criminogenic needs<sup>50</sup> and three-quarters (75%) of those clients' case plans included goals to address at least one of those needs. The majority of goals focused on enrolling, participating, and completing treatment programs, classes, or groups. While goals were generally specific, in many cases, the case plans did not track progress or the completion of the recommended interventions.

**Client Experiences.** In a client survey completed by 32 individuals, approximately two-thirds of clients indicated that they were very involved in the case planning process and very involved in deciding their case plan goals. However, in focus groups (n=12), most clients did not recall discussing goals or developing case plans with their probation officers. Clients who engaged in a collaborative case planning process found it helpful and motivating—they appreciated that their probation officer took the time to discuss their goals, developed a plan for how to achieve them, and kept them on track to succeed.

*"When I developed that plan in the very beginning, I thought I wouldn't meet the goals. I thought it would be so hard to do. It wasn't, just a little at a time. Like the college application, the grant, the classes, getting good grades, I'm doing all that stuff." –Probation Client*

**Training.** The Probation Department does not provide case planning training to new staff. While the Department's FY 2019-20 and FY 2020-21 training plan indicates that all officers should receive four hours of case planning booster training, no officers have received this training. The Department is currently working on developing case planning training.

## EPICS

**2018 EPICS Implementation Assessment.** A 2018 assessment on the use of EPICS by Patrick Schreiner noted the Department's commitment to EPICS and EBPs but observed that EPICS had not yet been implemented with the necessary frequency and fidelity. Recommendations from this assessment have been implemented or have been planned for implementation.<sup>51</sup> These include:

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<sup>48</sup> Case plans are not required for clients on low supervision.

<sup>49</sup> Data before the pandemic from May 23, 2019 to March 15, 2020. Data during the pandemic from March 16, 2020 to December 18, 2020.

<sup>50</sup> These clients had a risk score for at least one criminogenic need greater than zero. As noted earlier in this report, there are no scoring guides or thresholds to indicate whether a client's need is high, moderate, or low in each domain.

<sup>51</sup> Schreiner, P. (2018). Assessment on EPICS Implementation for Sonoma County: Preliminary Assessment on Adult Supervision.



## Sonoma County Probation

### Adult Community Supervision Process Evaluation

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- The establishment of an Adult EPICS workgroup and Juvenile EPICS workgroup of staff from different levels within Probation.
- Quarterly EPICS booster trainings.
- Regular inter-rater reliability meetings/sessions.

**Buy-In.** The low buy-in noted in the 2018 assessment continues to be a barrier to implementation. Though some line staff expressed that EPICS is a useful tool that helps them listen to clients, the majority of staff expressed concerns that it is too rigid and structured to allow for meaningful conversations, that the model is not appropriate for the adult population, and that it can be upsetting or triggering for clients to revisit difficult times. Staff perceived that the clients who may gain the most benefit from EPICS are often not as willing to engage.

*“As long as EPICS remains a mysterious, complex lengthy intervention that is only seen on choreographed videos, staff will have limited buy in.” –Probation Staff*

*“It puts us in a position where we’re trying to be therapists when that’s not what we’re trained to be. [Clients] start opening up, but you have to keep it in this schedule and format and have to audio record it.” –Probation Staff*

*“If you are in a good conversation and let it go for 40 minutes, they will say it’s too long regardless of what the client got out of it because I didn’t follow the model.” –Probation Staff*

**Training.** Over the past three years, the Probation Department’s training plan indicated that all new hires should receive 19.5 hours of training on EPICS and 14 hours on motivational interviewing. Each year, adult supervision officers should receive at least 8 hours for EPICS booster sessions. Training data from 2018-2020 indicates that EPICS boosters and training sessions are frequently provided and attended.

In response to the 2018 Assessment recommendation that the Probation Department make a deeper investment in EBP training for leadership and staff, the Probation Department increased the frequency of EPICS booster trainings and coaching sessions. The Department has in-house EPICS trainers and coaches, which increases internal capacity.

**Inter-Rater Reliability.** Probation officers are required to submit one tape of an EPICS session to their supervisor each month. Once they have demonstrated proficiency with EPICS, they are expected to submit a taped session quarterly. In the last few years, EPICS coaches also began participating in quarterly inter-rater reliability exercises.

**Utilization.** As noted in the 2018 Assessment, EPICS is not currently used with the necessary frequency. EPICS should be a daily practice that is used for almost all client contacts. Though the Department only requires that officers conduct a minimum of 10 EPICS sessions each month, many staff find the 10-session monthly target to be unattainable. In the ten months prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, only 12% of active probation clients participated in an EPICS session within the last 30 days. Between March and December 2020, the majority of officers stopped using EPICS during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to technology



barriers to implement EPICS remotely. This low use of EPICS will limit its positive impact since EPICS appears to be used sporadically and is not reinforced with clients over time.

*“EPICS standards give officers a minimum number of sessions to complete, rather than focusing on the most appropriate time to use EPICS and why. Sessions are completed to get them done, rather than understanding that using an intervention can really help an individual at a particular time.” –Probation Staff*

**Probation officer approaches and styles vary, which can lead to inconsistent client experiences. While some clients reported collaborative and supportive relationships with their supervising probation officer, others emphasized a lack of engagement and empathy.**

Many probation clients have positive experiences with their supervising probation officer and the Department. In a client survey completed by 32 individuals, over 90% of respondents indicated that their current supervising probation officer works with them to help complete probation, treats them with respect, is knowledgeable, and lets them know how they are doing. However, in focus groups, clients cited an inconsistency across probation officers in terms of how their probation officer relates with them, their probation officer’s level of engagement, and their probation officer’s level of empathy and understanding of their needs and lives. While many participants appreciated their current probation officer, they shared negative experiences with past probation officers.

The inconsistency in approach leads some clients to feel their probation officer understands them and is invested in their success, others to have a purely professional and not very personal dynamic, and some to have a more adversarial relationship. This inconsistency was also apparent in probation staff focus groups. While some probation officers expressed commitment in supporting clients, others, particularly those supervising high-risk caseloads, expressed skepticism that the individuals they supervise are interested and/or capable to succeed.

*“[My probation officer] goes over cost analysis with me, weighing the good points and the bad points, and makes me think about what I’ve lost and what I have to gain... He says if I have any doubts I can call him at any time, it’s nice to know he’s there.” –Probation Client*

*“Communication with my PO has been hostile since day one. For the first year if not more it was impossible to have free flowing dialogues. She would ask narrow, specific, fact finding questions. I never had the opportunity to communicate things outside those questions. I never could form a personal professional relationship. I had requests denied without any discussion.” –Probation Client*

Inconsistencies also extend to how clients are permitted to check in with or ask questions of their probation officer. Some probation officers allow clients to check in via text or email, while others require clients to call or show up in person. Some clients prefer telephone, text, or email communication because they can have less disruption to employment and other commitments. However, Probation line staff, particularly those with higher-risk caseloads, shared concerned that phone compliance is superficial and, from their perspective, does not hold clients sufficiently accountable.



## Behavior Response

### Background and Best Practices

Structured decision making in the justice system is an evidence-based, data-driven, research-based approach to inform how individuals are supervised, including supervision intensity and response to compliance and violations of probation conditions.<sup>52</sup> Structuring decision making is intended to create a more effective, consistent, and fair justice system and to ensure that justice agencies make decisions based on data and effective practice.

Probation responses should be swift, certain, and proportional to the behavior.<sup>53</sup> Structured decision-making processes can enhance transparency and reduce bias to guide the provision of rewards/incentives and graduated sanctions. Specifically, implementing a graduated response matrix that accounts for infraction frequency and severity to guide decision making practices around revoking probation for non-compliant behavior brings a greater degree of consistency, reliability, and equity to the assessment and decision-making process.<sup>54</sup> Providing incentives and recognition to promote behavior change, rather than negative accountability methods of punishment and criticism, increase the likelihood of success for individuals under community supervision.<sup>55</sup> Research suggests a 4:1 reward/reinforcement to sanction ratio is ideal,<sup>56</sup> and that utilizing structured, incremental responses to non-compliant behavior helps promote behavioral change and reduce recidivism.<sup>57</sup>

Procedural justice theory suggests that individuals are more likely to comply with the terms of probation if they are aware of the consequences for behavior and consider these responses to be fair.<sup>58</sup> As such, implementing a structured system with a range of graduated sanctions that takes into account the history of each individual and the severity of their violation can help to increase compliance with probation terms for all populations, and may reduce racial and ethnic disparities in technical violations and revocations.<sup>59,60</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Jannetta, J. (2017). Structured Decision-Making: Using Risk Assessment Outputs to Improve Practice. *Policy Brief 5*. The Public Safety Risk Assessment Clearinghouse.

<sup>53</sup> American Probation and Parole Association & the National Center for State Courts. (2013). Effective Responses to Offender Behavior: Lessons Learned from Probation and Parole Supervision.

<sup>54</sup> National Council on Crime and Delinquency (2015). Disposition Matrices: Purpose. [http://www.nccdglobal.org/sites/default/files/publication\\_pdf/disposition-matrices-purpose\\_handout.pdf](http://www.nccdglobal.org/sites/default/files/publication_pdf/disposition-matrices-purpose_handout.pdf).

<sup>55</sup> Taxman, F. S., Soule, D., & Gelb, A. (1999). Graduated Sanctions: Stepping into Accountable Systems and Offenders. *The Prison Journal*, 79(2), 182-204.

<sup>56</sup> Wodahl, E. J., Garland, B., Culhane, S. E., & McCarty, W. P. (2011). Utilizing Behavioral Interventions to Improve Supervision Outcomes in Community-Based Corrections. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 38(4), 386-405.

<sup>57</sup> Taxman, Soule, and Gelb, "Graduated Sanctions."

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Schrantz, D., & McElroy, J. (2000). Reducing Racial Disparity in the Criminal Justice System: A Manual for Practitioners and Policy Makers. Washington, DC: Sentencing Project.

<sup>60</sup> Cover, F., Mauer, M., & Ghandnoosh, N. (2014). Incorporating Racial Equity Into Criminal Justice Reform. Washington, DC: Sentencing Project.



## Findings

**The Department does not have tools to consistently respond to compliance and noncompliance. A Responses to Violations Policy, Incentive Response Grid, and Violation Response Grid have been drafted, but not yet implemented. Staff shared mixed buy-in for these tools.**

While a violations and incentives response grid and policy have been drafted, they are not currently implemented across the Department. Probation staff have mixed perceptions about the pending response matrix. While some see it as tool that can protect the Department and eliminate bias, others fear that it will be overly prescriptive and remove officers' discretion. Delays in rolling out the policies have also hampered staff buy-in.

*"The [behavior response] policies/practices have been in the works for at least five years, so maybe the lack of timeliness contributes to unfavorable buy-in since it has taken so long to put something together, making them seem not important." – Probation Staff*

The use of incentives or rewards is not a current Departmental policy or practice. Probation staff noted that some officers may believe that probation clients do not deserve to be rewarded and that the use of incentives could backfire if they are not perceived as valuable or fairly distributed.

*"We haven't figured out a way to cohesively reward people. We have lived in sanction world forever, but we've never worked out a consensus [for rewards]." – Probation Staff*

**Violations and flash incarcerations are used frequently. There does not appear to be any significant racial/ethnic disparities in the use of these sanctions.**

Of the 5,913 adults on probation supervision at any time during 2018-2020, 42% (n=2,236) of unique individuals had a violation of probation at any time during their supervision period that led to a booking in custody.<sup>61</sup>

The Department currently only uses flash incarcerations for the PRCS population; though they may begin to use flash incarcerations beyond the PRCS population. Of the 703 unique individuals on PRCS at any point during 2018-2020, 44% (n=311) received flash incarcerations at any point during their supervision. Some line staff, particularly those supervising AB 109 clients, maintained that custody time is the only effective tool they have to manage clients who are not compliant with probation conditions. Probation line staff noted that supervisors generally let them use at least some discretion when determining whether to file a violation, but some supervisors are more disposed to use violations instead of informal sanctions.

The Probation Department has tended to use close to the maximum amount of jail time for flash incarcerations. By statute, the length of a flash incarceration period can range from 1 to 10 days. Among the 311 individuals on PRCS who received a flash incarceration, the median flash incarceration length was approximately nine days, just under the maximum of 10 days.

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<sup>61</sup> The Department is not able to easily provide data on violations; therefore this evaluation was unable to report on violations that did not result in jail booking or the reasons for violations.



As shown in Table 8, the majority of flash incarcerations were for absconding/failure to report (44%), drug/alcohol use (24%), or a new crime (11%). The high proportion of individuals with flash incarcerations for absconding or failing to report may be due to the Department’s policy that requires probation officers to file an arrest warrant within three days if a client on PRCS or MS misses a scheduled appointment, fails to make contact with the supervising probation officer, or cannot be located.

**Table 8. Flash Incarceration Reasons (n=954)<sup>62</sup>**

Reason	#	%
Abscond/failure to report	419	44%
Drug/alcohol <sup>63</sup>	226	24%
New crime	105	11%
Other <sup>64</sup>	54	6%
Failure to attend or complete programs or treatment	54	6%
Fail to report address	35	4%
Failure to comply with instructions <sup>65</sup>	23	2%
Gangs	21	2%
Weapons	17	2%

A comparison of the race/ethnicity of the individuals who received violations and/or flash incarcerations, compared to the general population, does not indicate any racial disparities in the use of violations or flash incarcerations.<sup>66</sup> While these findings are promising, more robust and regular analysis is necessary to eliminate any concerns about disparate use of probation sanctions, which have been found in other jurisdictions.<sup>67</sup>

**Table 9. Race/Ethnicity of Individuals with Violations vs. the Supervision Population<sup>68</sup>**

Race/Ethnicity	Population with Violations	Supervision Population
Black	7%	7%
Hispanic	28%	32%
White	61%	56%

**Table 10. Race/Ethnicity of Individuals with Flash Incarcerations vs. the PRCS Population<sup>68</sup>**

Race/Ethnicity	Population with Flash Incarcerations	PRCS Population
Black	13%	12%
Hispanic	22%	26%
White	60%	56%

<sup>62</sup> Some violations have more than one reason, therefore the total number of reasons (n=954) exceeds the number of flash incarcerations (n=858).

<sup>63</sup> Drug/Alcohol includes any violations related to possession, use, or failure to report for chemical testing.

<sup>64</sup> Other includes associating with known felons, driving without a license, removal of GPS device, and “other.”

<sup>65</sup> Failure to comply with instructions includes violations that do not specify the nature of noncompliance, such as “failure to be of good conduct” and “failure to abide by PO directives.”

<sup>66</sup> As noted in the “Probation Population Overview,” Black and Hispanic individuals are overrepresented in the probation client population.

<sup>67</sup> Jannetta, J., Breaux, J., and Ho, H. (2014). Examining Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Probation Revocation: Summary Findings and Implications from a Multisite Study. Urban Institute.

<sup>68</sup> Data on American Indian and Asian/Pacific Islander rates not shown, due to low sample sizes. Data for individuals on probation supervision at any point during 2018-2020.





**Clients and partners have varied perceptions about the degree to which sanctions are used appropriately by the Department.**

Clients shared mixed perspectives on the fairness and transparency of the Probation Department. In the client survey, clients shared positive experiences with the Probation Department. Over 90% of respondents (n=30) indicated that they felt they had been treated very or somewhat fairly by staff at the Department over the last year. Over 80% of clients indicated that their supervising probation officer always or most the time made decisions based on the facts, tried to do the right thing, showed concerns for their rights, and treated them with dignity and respect.

In focus groups, a number of clients indicated that they were not clear about their terms and conditions when first starting supervision. Clients with substance use issues find probation terms particularly challenging to comply with and noted that some conditions do not set them up for success.

*“As an addict, if I had known the seriousness of them getting a dirty test, that that’s a violation and you get more time as you go along. I really had no idea about it. I got on felony probation and caught a first case the next day. A lawyer didn’t explain to me that I might not be successful as an addict. At the time I wasn’t on a program that was designed for people with addiction to be successful.” –Probation Client*

Some probation clients and staff from other justice agencies shared a sentiment that probation officers can have an overly rigid view of how probation clients should report and comply, and that sanctions do not always match the severity of the violation.

*“Some POs want perfection, they want you to be there on time, do what they ask when they ask ... The expectation that they do everything right is unattainable. They need a more holistic view. Are they getting better? Are they improving?” – Justice Partner*

*“My PO recommended I be maxed out, and that my misdemeanor convictions would run consecutively.... These were technical violations, not new crimes. And one violation was for having a bad attitude.” –Probation Client*

Many clients expressed an appreciation of lighter sanctions, particularly those not involving jail time and leading to disruptions in their employment. Line staff noted that the pandemic has presented opportunities for more informal consequences, and that treatment court in particular has had success with this shift.

*“Every time I get out of jail I lose my house or my job. If you want me to be rehabilitated, that’s not how. We need to figure out how to help people so jail isn’t the only option when you make a mistake.” –Probation Client*

*“For a lot of people they’ll agree to do anything to address the consequence informally. It keeps them out of jail, keeps them working, allows them to pay for housing. There’s no snowball reaction that can happen when you put them into custody and they can lose everything.” – Probation Staff*



## Programs and Services

### Background and Best Practices

Programming and supports are critical to probation clients' success. Supervision practices (e.g., supervision intensity, referrals for services) should be guided by validated risk and needs assessments tools that identify static and dynamic risk factors. Static risk factors are constant and include traits such as age at first arrest, gender, and history of substance use, while dynamic risk factors—or criminogenic needs—are malleable, and include characteristics such as family relationships, current substance use, and education which can be addressed through intervention and lower one's assessed risk for recidivism.<sup>69</sup> Studies indicate that clients' basic needs, such as housing<sup>70</sup> and income,<sup>71</sup> should also be met for them to effectively engage in services focused on addressing criminogenic needs. Probation officers should actively engage individuals under their supervision by using the RNR model to assess for risk and needs, work actively with clients to reduce dynamic risk factors and reinforce protective factors, and allocate appropriate resources to individuals at high risk to reoffend.

Research suggests that programming dosage should vary based on risk level, with the optimal impact on recidivism reached after high-risk individuals receive at least 200 hours of dosage and moderate risk individuals receive at least 100 hours of dosage.<sup>72</sup> However, while these estimates can act as a guideline to inform programming decisions, "practitioners still have a responsibility to tailor decisions about dosage to each individual offender's unique constellation of risk and need factors, protective factors, treatment history, current life circumstances, and program resources."<sup>73</sup>

In order to refer clients to available and appropriate services, probation staff and individuals with experience connecting clients to treatment and supports should collaborate to develop a list of programming with service details such as provider name, eligibility criteria, service capacity, support type (e.g., service, treatment), and intensity (e.g., outpatient, residential).<sup>74</sup> While linking clients to effective programming is an important step in the service delivery process, the ability to do so successfully is dependent upon service availability, quality, and the fidelity of services to best practices.<sup>75</sup> The Department should review programming to assess for quality and, as needed, establish guidelines that must be met by providers to receive referrals from probation.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> James, N. (2015). Risk and Needs Assessment in the Criminal Justice System. *Congressional Research Service*.

<sup>70</sup> Palmer, C. Phillips, D.C. & Sullivan, J.X. (2019). Does Emergency Financial Assistance Reduce Crime? *Journal of Public Economics*, 169, 34-51.

<sup>71</sup> Agan, A.Y. & Makowsky, M.D. (2018). The Minimum Wage, EITC, and Criminal Recidivism. *SSRN*.

<sup>72</sup> Sperber, K., Latessa, E. & Makarios, M. (2013). Examining the Interaction between Level of Risk and Dosage of Treatment. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*. 40. 338-348.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Council of State Governments Justice Center. (2011). *A Ten-Step Guide to Transforming Probation Departments to Reduce Recidivism*. [https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/Publications/CSG\\_10Step\\_Guide\\_Probation.pdf](https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/Publications/CSG_10Step_Guide_Probation.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> Gleicher, L. & Green, E. (2020). *Effective Strategies in Community Supervision: Core Correctional Practices and Motivational Interviewing*. Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

<sup>76</sup> Burke, P. (2008). *The TPC Reentry Handbook: Implementing the NIC Transition from Prison to the Community Model*. National Institute of Corrections and the Center for Effective Public Policy.



## Findings

**A range of programs and resources are available to address probation clients’ criminogenic and stabilization needs, with a number of services co-located in the DRC.**

Table 11 outlines programming offered to clients under supervision through the DRC and in the community. The focus on skill-based programming along with stabilizing services is aligned with the RNR model and reentry best practices.

**Table 11. Community-Based Programming<sup>77</sup>**

Location	Program Type	Program Name	Provider Type
<b>Day Reporting Center (DRC)</b>	Cognitive Behavioral Interventions & Anger/ Conflict Management	Cognitive Behavioral Interventions (CBI)	Probation Department
		Aggression Replacement Training (ART)	Probation Department
		Advanced Practices (AP)	Probation Department
	Education	High school degree completion and GED	CBO
		College courses	Community College
	Family Support	Parenting	CBO
	Employment	Job Link	County Human Services Department
	Substance Use	Outpatient substance use program	CBO
	Other Programs	Benefits eligibility and enrollment services	County Human Services Department
Women’s Circle – ended in 2018		CBO	
<b>Non-DRC</b>	Mental Health	Mental health programs, including crisis services, outpatient treatment, residential treatment, case management, and peer run self-help centers	County Behavioral Health Division, CBOs
	Substance Use	Residential substance use programs	CBOs
		Substance use programs including detox, residential treatment, outpatient treatment, and case management services	County Behavioral Health Division
	Housing	Transitional housing	CBO
		Emergency shelter/support	CBO
		Independent living support & Supportive housing for transition age youth	CBO

<sup>77</sup> Note: This list reflects the programs to which Probation staff indicated they most frequently refer clients and is not a comprehensive list of services offered in Sonoma County.



## Sonoma County Probation

### Adult Community Supervision Process Evaluation

Location	Program Type	Program Name	Provider Type
	Other Programs	Sex offender treatment (SAFER)	CBO (self-pay)
		Domestic violence groups	CBO (self-pay)
		Second Chance Club	Community College

In the client survey, individuals reported high satisfaction with the DRC, as well as employment and benefits eligibility services. Clients reported moderate satisfaction with mental health services, SAFER, parenting/family services, and substance use treatment and low satisfaction with domestic violence groups.

Stakeholders emphasized that co-located service models, like the DRC, facilitate access for individuals on probation supervision. Many probation staff, CBOs, and clients appreciate the one-stop services available in the DRC and believe that one-stop service models are particularly effective for individuals on probation supervision with complex needs. The DRC adapted during COVID-19 to pause some services, offer classes and programs online, and decrease class sizes. Although DRC programs served fewer clients than before COVID-19, providers reported that the attendance rates were as high as they were prior to the pandemic.

*“I thought the DRC was the best because people who were released from jail and under supervision had a great place to come get what they needed to prevent them from becoming desperate. All the resources being a one-stop-shop with all of us there was fabulous.” –Community-Based Provider*

While the Department has a variety of services available to individuals under probation supervision, one area justice partners noted could be further expanded is peer-based services, as individuals with lived experience are particularly effective in delivering therapeutic support, mentorship, and advocacy services and assisting with service linkages and system navigation.

**While the Department has invested in evaluations to understand the effectiveness of programs, data on referrals, participation, and dosage outside of the DRC is limited.**

The Community Corrections Partnership (CCP) and Probation Department have contracted with RDA to evaluate a number of programs that receive funding to serve individuals under probation supervision, including the DRC, Job Link, Outpatient Substance Use Treatment, Turning Point (residential substance use treatment), and transitional housing services. These evaluations have found that overall, these programs provide important services to address probation clients’ needs and identified a number of cross-cutting barriers or challenges that impede program implementation and effectiveness.

While probation officers may refer clients to a range of services and resources, data on service referrals and participation beyond the DRC are limited. The department does not have a central location to monitor service referrals and receipt across individuals under probation supervision. Some programming information is captured in the EPICS and case plan notes; however the level of detail is inconsistent across records, which makes it challenging to accurately measure program referrals, participation, and dosage.



**High needs, limited services, and financial barriers create challenges in fully supporting clients and providing recommended amounts of programming dosage.**

The DRC—which is the primary option for justice-involved individuals to receive cognitive behavioral interventions—is only able to serve between 100-150 clients at a time. Of the 5,913 unique adults active on community supervision at any time between January 1, 2018 and December 14, 2020, 17% enrolled in the DRC at some point while they were under probation supervision. Since 64% of all probation clients were assessed as high or moderate risk, this indicates that the majority of high- and moderate-risk clients do not enroll in the DRC and, therefore, do not receive cognitive behavioral interventions or anger/conflict management. Though the number of individuals under probation supervision will decrease as a result of AB 1950, shortened probation terms will also decrease the amount of time which clients can be referred, enroll, and participate in DRC programs.

Probation clients shared varying experiences being connected to housing resources and emphasized that permanent housing continues to be a challenge. Some clients were appreciative that their probation officers connected them to a housing provider, InterFaith Shelter Network (IFSN), while others asked Probation for housing support and found that their probation officer never followed-up on the request. Although IFSN provides robust transitional and rapid re-housing housing programs, few long-term and permanent housing supports exist within the county.

In addition to challenges securing permanent housing, there are limited programs to which clients with behavioral health needs can be referred. Based on ONA results, the majority (84%) of probation clients have experienced a drug and/or alcohol problem and almost half (44%) have had a mental health problem. Probation and Behavioral Health staff shared that there is not enough mental health treatment at all levels of severity. In addition, probation staff indicated that clients on probation supervision for long periods of time are often not interested or not allowed to repeat programs they have already completed. This is a particular challenge for individuals who require residential SUD treatment and have already participated in the few residential services available in the county.

Finances can also pose a significant barrier to program participation. Clients, probation staff, and justice partners noted that domestic violence classes, Sex Offenders and Families in Effective Recovery (SAFER), and Treatment Accountability for Safer Communities (TASC) will not serve individuals who have outstanding fees. While the Department provides some funding for SAFER, some clients are mandated to participate in services they are unable to afford with no alternatives. Three of the 32 client survey respondents (9%) indicated that they did not receive services because they were too expensive.

*“Almost every day we ask if they’ve been screened by TASC or drug treatment, and they say they can’t because they owe TASC \$80. They can’t get treatment because they owe a small amount of money.” – Justice Partner*



**While the County has created additional opportunities to support collaboration between the Probation Department and other County departments; communication between probation staff and community-based providers is less consistent.**

The County has expanded opportunities for representatives from multiple systems to collaborate to support high-need clients. The Interdepartmental Multidisciplinary Team (IMDT) care coordination model began at the end of 2017 under the County's ACCESS (Accessing Coordinated Care and Empowering Self-Sufficiency) initiative and has since grown to six cohorts focused on different needs (e.g., High Needs Homeless, Mental Health Diversion). Representatives from the Probation Department participate in the IMDT on a weekly, ongoing basis. The IMDT identifies people who interact with multiple county departments and convenes relevant agencies to share data and explore interventions. The IMDT is viewed by all agencies involved (i.e., Behavioral Health, Probation, Wellpath, Human Services, CBOs) as an effective way to engage in interdepartmental coordination and support collaborative client case management.

*“IMDT has helped come up with realistic plans that are really beneficial for clients.”*  
*–Behavioral Health Staff*

While opportunities for collaboration exist internally in the County, communication with community-based providers is less consistent. Probation officers are not aware of all of the community-based programming available to clients, which can prevent timely and appropriate connections to services. In particular, CBOs and probation staff reported limited engagement and less streamlined communication with organizations that do not have contracts with the department. Non-contracted CBOs shared that at times the Department did not understand the scope of services they provide and suggested designating a contact in the Probation Department with whom to share program updates. Similarly, probation line staff and supervisors found it challenging to stay abreast of the status of each CBO and the available services.



# Recommendations

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The recommendations below are intended to strengthen the Department and support the use of promising and evidence-based practices. They are based on RDA's assessment of current practices and include a number of suggestions from the evaluation's Advisory Team.

## 1. Organizational Culture and Communication

The following recommendations are intended to strengthen the Department's organization culture, including staff morale and internal communication.

**1.1 Through a collaborative process, review implementation of the 2018-2020 Strategic Plan and refine key focus areas for the Department.** Engaging staff at all levels of the Department to review achievements, identify barriers and facilitators, and define new and existing priorities would provide a venue for collaboration and support organizational cohesion. The Department should use this opportunity to demonstrate that line staff's feedback is valued and provide clear communication to staff about how their input will be used.

- During this process, the Department should revisit its mission, vision, and core values to ensure they accurately reflect the Department's purpose, ideal state, and the beliefs and practices that will help the organization arrive at that ideal. In particular, the Department should consider a greater emphasis on service provision and replacing the terms "delinquent youth" and "adult offenders" with more person-centered language.
- While resistance to some evidence-based practices will likely be voiced during strategic planning sessions, this will provide an opportunity for Department leadership to engage and educate staff about why the Department and the larger field of probation have embraced EBPs to reduce recidivism and how officers can utilize EBPs to engage more effectively with clients.

**1.2 Expand mechanisms to recognize staff and celebrate successes.** The Department currently recognizes staff through performance evaluations, verbal praise, and yearly peer-nominated staff recognition awards. To increase staff morale and highlight positive contributions, the Department should develop additional ways to appreciate staff's contributions and celebrate successes. Given that private appreciation might better reflect the current organizational culture, this can include staff awards, acknowledgment of staff achievements in personal email communication from leadership, and unit and department meetings as appropriate. Advisory Team members also recommended developing an incentive grid to uniformly reward staff and creating opportunities for lateral recognition across staff.

**1.3 Strengthen internal communication, particularly between management and line staff.** The Department should expand mechanisms for line staff to provide feedback to management, including ways to provide more private feedback. The Advisory Team identified a number of



options, including: (1) dedicating a portion of unit meetings to identify staff questions for management (which supervisors can either send to management and/or management can address directly), (2) online surveys, (3) small group meetings between staff and managers, and (4) promoting and reinforcing the use of supervisors to provide feedback to management. Other strategies to support more interaction between management and line staff include coffee with the Chief, brown bag lunches, division meetings, and more informal visits with management.

The Department should consider how and when different types of information are communicated by senior management, with key organizational messages shared directly from senior management to line staff. The dissemination and adoption of new information and practices may also be supported by providing supervisors an opportunity to receive and inquire about departmental updates prior to broader dissemination, to help ensure supervisors are informed and prepared to support line staff.

Advisory Team members also recommended maintaining some virtual meetings to facilitate scheduling (which can be recorded to make them available to all staff or for use in unit meetings) and weekly or biweekly email briefings from management to provide direct updates on Departmental changes. Meetings should provide an opportunity for management to present information, as well as address any issues or inconsistencies identified by staff.

## 2. Navigating the Dual Roles and Responsibilities

The following recommendations are intended to assist probation officers in managing their roles and responsibilities, particularly regarding a perceived dichotomy between law enforcement and behavior change.

**2.1 Support staff in understanding how to navigate their role.** Operating as both a helper and an enforcer of court orders can place staff in situations that appear contradictory. However, there are elements that make a helper an effective agent of change (e.g., caring) and elements that make an enforcer an effective agent of change (e.g., clear communicator). Staff policies, training, and Departmental communication should reinforce that these roles are complementary and how behavior change is integral to public safety. The Department should establish clear policies that dictate how probation officers are expected to engage with clients, including behavior expectations that reflect operationalization of the helper and enforcer positions as well as strategies to address barriers (e.g., time, ability) to achieving balance in these roles. These expectations should be integrated into supervision practices, staff meetings, and policies and handbooks.

Staff training, in particular, can demonstrate how staff should combine the helpful characteristics of both roles to improve their effectiveness. These can include:

- Refresher trainings on building a collaborative working relationship and role clarification, which is part of the EPICS model
- Regular coaching to support line staff in utilizing the helper and enforcer roles and addressing barriers as they arise





- Tangible examples of everyday interactions with clients and how roles can show up in ways that are complementary
- Internal videos with Sonoma County probation clients

**2.2 Collect data to identify how staff spend their time and use these data to revise Department expectations, policies, and practices.** Officers do not feel as though they have time to complete all of their responsibilities and oftentimes do not meet Department expectations on client contacts, case planning, and EPICS sessions. To support time management, the Department should collect data on how staff spend their time. This could be through a time study in which staff calendars are reviewed, staff complete a survey estimating the amount of time spent per week on different activities, or supervisors shadow staff.<sup>78</sup> The structure of the time study can be flexible to collect accurate information about how staff allocate their time while minimizing the administrative burden.

While collecting data on how officers spend their time, the Department should also identify how officers should be spending their time (e.g., proportion of time spent on client contacts, staff meetings, paperwork, travel). Comparing the ideal use of time to the actual use of time should inform changes to Departmental policies and practices, including contact standards. Department expectations for officers should be feasible and aligned with the Department’s mission.

As expectations, policies, and practices around staff responsibilities are revised, the Department should explore strategies for line staff to allocate more time to ongoing client engagement and develop more structured schedules.

One member of the Advisory Team suggested that the Department review opportunities for the front office to support line staff’s administrative responsibilities (e.g., scheduling). They also recommended considering a more robust officer of the day system and a team specializing in field operations to allow officers to dedicate scheduled time for office visits (including EPICS sessions) and field work. In order to understand how staff allocate their time and support shared administrative responsibilities, an Advisory Team member also suggested requiring staff to use their online calendars to schedule and track work.

### 3. Client Engagement

The following recommendations are intended to increase buy-in and comfort with evidence-based practices to support client engagement.

**3.1 Develop peer-led learning opportunities to support buy-in and use of motivational interviewing and other EBPs.** Peer-led learning opportunities can help support buy-in for and comfort using EBPs through peer coaching, peer mentorship, and/or the establishment of communities of practice. Communities of practice are groups of staff who meet periodically to practice skills, share successes, and learn from each other. They can focus on motivational interviewing, EPICS, and any

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<sup>78</sup> The 2018 EPICS assessment also recommended a time study.



other intervention or tool that the Department is utilizing. The Department should also consider expanding internal and external peer coaching and learning opportunities, including scheduling meetings with staff in equivalent positions at other probation departments that regularly utilize EBPs.

**3.2 Review implementation of the 2018 EPICS Assessment recommendations.** The Department has implemented the majority of the 2018 EPICS Assessment recommendations. The EPICS workgroups should discuss which strategies resulted in greater buy-in and use of EPICS and which strategies require continued attention and investment, with the goal of making EPICS a daily practice for almost all client contacts. The Department should leverage the lessons learned from the EPICS and consider how they can be applied to other EBPs.

**3.3 Strengthen training to better support how officers work with clients and the use of EBPs.** The following strategies can help bolster training:

- Provide periodic booster trainings to encourage utilization of EBPs and prevent decay. Booster trainings are currently offered for EPICS, but are not provided for risk and needs assessment, case planning, and motivational interviewing.<sup>79</sup> Ongoing trainings should also be offered on trauma-informed and gender-responsive practices; facilitating connections to prosocial community members; motivational interviewing and cognitive behavioral interventions; and implicit bias and cultural competency.
- Review training data to ensure that trainings outlined in the annual training plan are offered and attended.
- Implement strategies to reduce the training burden on staff and promote uptake of new skills, such as: incorporating client engagement practices into existing trainings where possible to reduce the total number of trainings required; expanding coaching models to promote staff skill development; and developing mechanisms to recognize and reward the implementation of new skills.

**3.4 Standardize and expand mechanisms for clients to communicate with their supervising probation officer to increase accessibility and create consistency.** Absconding and/or failing to report to probation is the most common reason for flash incarcerations. To support clients' communication with their probation officers, the Department should develop policies requiring probation officers to communicate virtually and/or adopt tools to support communication via text (e.g., Uptrust, OffenderLink).<sup>80</sup> These strategies can help decrease barriers to reporting, strengthen relationships between clients and officers, and create consistency across the Department.

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<sup>79</sup> Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, motivational interviewing booster trainings were provided every two years.

<sup>80</sup> Uptrust is a smartphone app adopted by public defenders' offices and probation departments to support communication between staff and clients.



**3.5 As the Probation Department strengthens its case planning process, ensure there is a mechanism to assess case plan quality and completeness.** At the time of this report, the Probation Department was reviewing and making changes to the case planning process and software platform. It will be important to periodically assess the completeness of case plans and their alignment with clients' needs. In order to examine how probation officers are making program referrals—including the alignment of referrals to clients' needs, the consistency of program referrals, and the time between assessment and referral—the Probation Department should ensure data collection fields are in place to support this analysis.

## 4. Behavior Response

The following recommendations are intended to promote the use of incentives and ensure that both sanctions and incentives are used in an effective, consistent, and equitable manner.

**4.1 Refine and release the behavior response grid and policy, which should include both incentives and sanctions.** Research indicates a 4:1 incentive to sanction ratio is ideal. Therefore the Department should make sure to launch an integrated behavior management system that includes both sanctions and rewards, so the focus is not only on sanctions. While refining these policies, the Department should consider the following.<sup>81</sup>

- Offer meaningful and motivational incentives to promote and support behavior change. The Department's draft policy includes a range of incentives that span verbal praise to recommendation for early probation termination. As the policy is implemented, the Department should encourage probation officers to identify additional incentives that are most meaningful to the clients they supervise
- Expand the use of verbal and written reprimands to respond to all low-level behaviors (e.g., failure to report as directed, failure to maintain employment or schooling), regardless of risk level. This will expand officer autonomy and is necessary to give clients the opportunity to self-correct behavior.
- Ensure that the behaviors and responses classified as "high" in the violation response grid are appropriately categorized. Specifically, consider whether refusal to take prescribed psychotropic medications, refusal to participate in prescribed treatment programs, and refusal to engage in behavioral change should warrant the responses categorized under the strategies as a high behavior.<sup>82</sup>
- Clearly distinguish accountability responses (e.g., reprimands, increased reporting, flash incarceration, court appearance) and behavioral change responses (e.g., skill practice, classes and support groups, homework, treatment assessment and referral) in policies, the response grid, and training. Officers and clients should not consider behavioral change responses to be a punishment, but an intervention that can help avoid sanctions.

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<sup>81</sup> Some recommendations are based on the review of the draft grids and policy (dated April 12, 2021) shared with the evaluation team.

<sup>82</sup> These policies may also increase the likelihood that clients with behavioral health needs will get sanctions.



- Establish mechanisms to ensure that flash incarcerations are only used for cases that pose a significant and real threat to public safety and that the default approach is not to use the maximum time available.

**4.2 Support implementation of the behavior response policy through training, bidirectional communication, and data.** Specifically, the Department should:

- Train officers on the behavior response policies and develop tools to support their use. Since the use of incentives or rewards is not a current practice, training will be necessary to explain the importance of incentives and how to embed and structure incentives into client interactions. As noted by the Advisory Team, officers will need to understand how incentives can be beneficial in promoting positive behavior change.
- Provide opportunities for officers to share feedback on behavior response policies and be open to revisions, based on this feedback.
- Communicate to clients the incentives and sanctions they may receive while on probation supervision and the behaviors that will warrant these responses. Emphasizing incentives can help increase clients' motivation.
- Develop data collection strategies to measure fidelity to these policies and identify any disparities in their use. Specifically, monitor whether certain populations experience more sanctions due to specific policies.

## 5. Programs and Services

The following recommendations are intended to address gaps in services, enhance collaboration between probation officers and service providers, and strengthen program referral and participation data collection.

- 5.1 **Reduce barriers and expand services to meet client needs.** Based on the identified service gaps and barriers, the Department and the County should work toward addressing the following unmet needs.

### *Service Availability*

- Cognitive Behavioral Interventions. The DRC does not currently have capacity to serve all moderate- and high-risk probation clients. Since the DRC is the primary source for clients to receive cognitive behavioral interventions, the Department should identify how to expand the capacity of the DRC or provide cognitive behavioral interventions outside of the DRC. If possible, expanding the DRC is most advisable to benefit from the accessibility and other advantages provided by the co-located service model.
- Permanent Housing. Work with County partners to continue exploring options to meet the long-term housing needs of individuals under probation supervision. This could include strengthening partnerships with organizations that facilitate housing access and increasing staff knowledge of existing housing supports and services.
- Behavioral Health Service Availability. Consider ways to expand residential SUD treatment, including the number of beds and service providers. Additionally, review opportunities to



## Sonoma County Probation

### Adult Community Supervision Process Evaluation

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connect clients with mild-to-moderate mental illness to existing community-based services and ways to expand County outpatient and residential treatment for serious mental illness.

- Peer-based services. Develop partnerships with community-based providers who can offer evidence-based mentoring and other peer-based services to individuals who are on probation supervision.

#### *Service Access*

- Mandated Service Costs. Pay or provide a sliding scale for court-mandated programs that have a cost.
- Geographic Service Access. Post the COVID-19 pandemic, continue to provide options for virtual program participation to mitigate scheduling and transportation barriers. Also consider providing gas cards and bus passes to individuals for whom transportation is a barrier.

#### *Service Participation*

- Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Service Receipt. Explore disparities in the proportion of Hispanic clients who receive services relative to their representation in the overall probation population. Given that past evaluations found disparities in the proportion of Hispanic/Latino clients receiving services relative to the overall Probation population, ensure Hispanic/Latino clients are supported at the same rate as other individuals under Probation supervision.
- Program Completion. Design and implement an incentive system to encourage successful program completion and address the low completion rate of community-based programs.

- 5.2 **Expand opportunities for coordination between community-based service providers and probation officers.** Given that service providers and probation officers often operate in silos, explore opportunities to increase collaboration and engage in shared learning. Consider regularly convening (e.g., through monthly virtual meetings) community-based providers and probation staff to share program updates, discuss client engagement, and troubleshoot logistical challenges. To develop a mutual understanding of probation's supervision practices, offer cross-trainings with service providers and probation staff on the RNR model.

To further enhance engagement between service providers and the Department, consider designating a probation staff member as a community services liaison officer, to oversee communication and coordination with all community-based organizations and providers. The liaison can serve as the primary contact through which program staff share information about their services with the Department. In turn, probation officers can request information about community-based services and supports to meet the needs of the individuals they supervise. The liaison can also maintain the list of community-based services and expand this resource to include more dynamic program details (e.g., program capacity).

- 5.3 **Increase awareness of available programs and services.** Develop an updated list of all community-based services that includes program descriptions, eligibility criteria, and contact



information. This resource list can be available in the probation office and virtually to help streamline service referrals and be maintained by an administrative aid within the Department (e.g., the community services liaison officer). The resource list can also serve to engage clients in service decisions – probation officers and individuals under their supervision can review the service list together, discuss clients’ options, and select appropriate services.

- 5.4 **Establish a system to record and monitor client service referrals and receipt.** Explore systems (e.g., software, policies, procedures) to support consist, accurate recording of program referrals, participation, and dosage for all probation clients. Consider processes with a low administrative burden that are simple, efficient, and maximize data validity. This system could facilitate further coordination and communication between service providers and probation officers.

## 6. Data

The following recommendations cut across the preceding domains are intended to support the Department in using data to inform decision making and measure success.

- 6.1 **Identify Departmental goals and associated performance measures, collect data to measure progress toward these goals, and share results across the Department.** As part of the strategic planning process, the Department should identify its short-term and long-term goals and objectives and establish associated performance measures to calculate progress toward its goals. Goals and performance measures should include measures of client success, such as: reducing clients’ criminogenic risk scores and increasing their protective factors; successful completion of probation; and early release from probation. Given the high use of violations and flash incarcerations, the Department should also consider a goal of reducing the use of formal sanctions for technical violations and increasing the use of incentives and informal sanctions. Some data will likely already be collected by the Department (e.g., ONA scores to measure change in criminogenic and protective factors), while other data collection methods may need to be developed or strengthened.
- 6.2 **Track successful, unsuccessful, and neutral probation supervision exits.** In order to measure and track the degree to which probation clients are successful while under probation supervision—and variations in success rates across risk levels, demographics, and caseload types—the Department should work with the Court to develop a shared understanding of the definition of supervision grant exit statuses (particularly expired and terminated). If these cannot be used to determine whether an exit was successful, the Department should identify how to track and monitor successful probation completion.
- 6.3 **Develop mechanisms to receive client feedback.** A survey could produce valuable insights to strengthen adult supervision practices and programs, as well as engage and empower probation



clients.<sup>83</sup> The Department should consider ways to encourage client survey from clients with diverse backgrounds and experiences and develop approaches (such as anonymity) to ensure the information provided is an honest reflection of clients' experiences.

- 6.4 Conduct validation of the Probation Department adult risk and needs assessment tool locally.** The SRNA was developed and validated by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy but has not been validated locally in Sonoma County. Through the validation, assess for potential racial/ethnic and gender disparities.
- 6.5 Address limitations in data collection on race/ethnicity and gender identity in order to effectively carry out analyses that examine bias and inequity in the system.** Justice partners have an opportunity to enable individuals to self-report their race/ethnicity and add options for clients to indicate a gender identity other than male or female. Changes could be made by all justice partners collaboratively, or individual justice agencies could decide to create additional categories. For the purposes of federal reporting requirements, additional categories could be combined during the reporting process to align with the required federal categories.

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<sup>83</sup> The Department may consider using the survey developed for this evaluation, which was adapted from the juvenile client survey.