

## Example 12. A Primer on System Mapping

### Rhode Island Transition from Prison to Community (TPC) Initiative A Primer for Mapping Current Transition/Reentry Process

The system mapping exercise will produce an accurate and detailed flow chart that describes how inmates move through a state's correction system, onto community supervision, and how they are eventually discharged from corrections supervision and moved into aftercare. System mapping will give corrections and human service officials a common understanding of the process, and help them assess problems, identify solutions, set priorities, and plan implementation of reforms.

The system map should display in graphic terms how offenders flow through your correctional system. It should display the important decision points through which offenders move in order to enter, pass through, and exit your system. Each decision point will have (a) inputs, (b) decisions and (c) outputs.

Inputs may consist of the individuals about whom decisions are made. They also may consist of information transmitted from one part of the organization to another that is used to make decisions about those individuals. A decision point may have single or multiple input channels.

Decisions are made by identifiable persons who make choices about individual offenders by applying particular criteria or decision rules to information about the individual offenders.

Outputs from decision points may consist of individuals and information. A decision point may have multiple output channels. Each output channel becomes an input to a subsequent decision point.

For the initial mapping exercise, we suggest you focus on individual offenders as inputs to and outputs from decision points. Later, you may want to do a similar mapping of information flow to identify strengths and weaknesses of your system.

The system map should encompass decision points that support the following functions that are essential elements of the TPC Model:

- Assessment and Classification
- Inmate Behavior and Programming
- Release Preparation
- Release Decision-making
- Supervision and Services
- Violations and Revocation
- Discharge, and
- Aftercare.

These elements may not (probably will not) translate cleanly into the decision points in your system. Indeed, one of the TCPI elements (e.g., Violations and Revocation) may consist of a cluster of decision points and their related inputs and output flows.

Your system map should display enough detail to accurately show how particular flows occur within your system. For example, the TPC model has an element termed "Release Decision-Making". Each state will have a different set of processes by which release decisions are made, and your flow chart should reflect them. Some states will have more, and some less, complex flow charts around release decision making, and around other elements of the TPC model.

Your system map should display aspects of the offender flow that are specific or unique to your correctional system. For example, a substantial portion of Indiana’s prison inmates are released not to parole, but to probation, and are supervised by court-based local probation officers after their release from prison rather than by state parole officers. That practice should show up as an additional flow in Indiana’s system map. Similarly, Indiana has a release channel called “community corrections” that would need to be displayed within its system map.

You may want to begin by drawing a rough system map (one that covers the entire system, but that contains less detailed information than you eventually will develop). You could divide this rough map into “zones”. For example, one “zone” might be labeled “Intake” or “Reception”, or “Front-End”. This zone might cover processes by which sentenced offenders are:

- received into the custody of your correctional agency,
- assigned to initial intake housing (e.g., sent to a central reception center);
- assessed (e.g. information to determine offenders’ risks and needs are gathered from other sources, from diagnostic tests, or from interviews.);
- classified (decisions about offenders’ custody levels and housing assignments);
- Initial case plans are developed based on assessment and classification results.

You might want assign a different group of staff members to develop a sub-map for each zone. These staff members should be well acquainted with the processes and flows included within their particular zone of the overall system map. The individual sub-maps they produce could be assembled to form a more detailed overall system map.

Each decision point in the system map should be clearly labeled, and distinguished from all others. Each input to a decision point and each output from a decision point also should be clearly and unambiguously labeled.

The next step is to **document** the system map by assembling available information about the:

- Flow of offenders into and out of the decision point;
  - number,
  - characteristics,
  - source,
  - destination,
  - problems
    - It is particularly important to note—to the extent possible—the proportion of offenders who have problems for which an agency other than corrections has formal jurisdiction (e.g., substance abuse, mental illness, housing, employment, etc.).
- Decision criteria or practices
  - what are they?
  - who established them?
  - how do they work?
  - who makes the decisions?
  - how long does it take?
  - what does it costs?

It is important to document what you know AS WELL AS WHAT YOU DO NOT KNOW about decision points and inputs and outputs in the system map. For example, to fully document a flow or decision point you may need information that another agency possesses or controls. If you know where that information is, but cannot quickly access it, note that in the documentation. If you don’t know whether the information is available, or, if it is available, whether you can get access to it, indicate that. As more agencies become engaged as partners in the Transition planning process, these information gaps can be filled.

If also is important include information in the documentation about problems with the flow of offenders in and out of decision points, or about the decision making process. For example, note if some information that decision makers need to process cases in a timely was is often missing, arrives late, or is highly unreliable, and thus, results in delays in decision making. This is a preliminary notation of problems, barriers, and obstacles, and will be supplemented by additional inquiry, dialog, and scrutiny as planning moves forward. The objective is to capture well-known, chronic, or especially significant problems as a starting point.

Finally, you should compare the system map with the elements of the TCPI model. For each TCPI element you should note the extent to which your existing practices conform or do not conform to the expectations of the TPC model. For example, the TPC model expects that assessments will be done very soon after inmates enter your prisons, and will be done using empirically validated risk instruments that measure both static and dynamic risk factors. How soon after admission are inmates assessed? Is your risk assessment instrument validated for your population? When was it validated (if it was 20 years ago, it probably needs to be done again)? Does your risk instrument include on both static (ones that do not change, like prior criminal record) and dynamic (ones that can change with interventions, like substance abuse) risk predictors?

Similarly, the TPC model expects that Transition Accountability Plans will be formulated for each inmate soon after they complete their assessments. These plans should address the dynamic risk factors identified in the assessments, and guide provision of programs and services as inmates pass through prison, into community supervision, and on to discharge. Do you have a case planning process that structures inmates' access to and participation in programs while confined? How soon after assessment does that case planning process start? Does it address inmates' identified dynamic risk factors? What proportion of case plans are actually implemented during confinement? What factors limit implementation of those plans? Does your case planning process guide programming after inmates are released from prison?